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Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

Introduction

Gwyneth Shanks

Not-About-AIDS-Dance

In 1994 American choreographer Neil Greenberg premiered *Not-About-AIDS-Dance* at The Kitchen in New York. The work, for five dancers, was created over the course of a year in which Greenberg's brother passed away from AIDS-related complications; another dancer, Ellen Barnaby, lost her mother; and eight of Greenberg's close friends died from AIDS. The loss that marked the lives of the five dancers was conveyed to audience members through text projected on a scrim behind them. Wry and dry, at times darkly funny, and at other moments devastating in its simplicity, these texts created a kind of dance in counter time, in which the choreographed movement and the written words traced two distinct, yet entirely entangled, narratives. The movement phrases viewers watched were generated in rehearsals marked by loss; to dance, the piece proposed, was a process of moving through, with, and alongside the grief of death and the AIDS epidemic.

American poet D. A. Powell begins *Tea* (1998), the first collection in what some consider to be the poet's trilogy on the AIDS epidemic, with the line, "This is not a book about AIDS." The "not" of Powell's opening sentence and the "not" of Greenberg's title are negatives that carry alongside themselves—like ghostly twins of those three letters—a "yes." It is a *not* that is always already a yes, a declaration, which acknowledges that to discuss, or not, a topic is to end up discussing much more. It is to wander, in the case of Greenberg and Powell, into discourses of memory, and childhood, death and dying, health care and homophobia. The title of this special edition of *Lateral*, "Not a Trump Issue," references Greenberg's dance (as well as such titular homages like Victoria Marks's 2007 *Not About Iraq* evening length dance) and Powell's prologue.

The "not" of the title here hopes to privilege resistant actions that are never reducible to nor fully concerned with the Trump administration's policies and actions. In the wake of the administration's tacit and overt support of white supremacist and sexist ideologies, deregulation, and global climate change denial, and increasingly successful attempts at voter suppression and the criminalization of communities of color, "Not a Trump Issue" questions how scholars, artists, and educators can enunciate their own forms of resistance. While "issue," in the title is an easy pun on the format of the journal issue, it also aims to privilege actions that surface deeper historical structures of inequity or dispossession. This issue, in other words, is interested in how repudiation and activism, response and passivity, and the present and the past exist together; the issues at stake for the authors in "Not a Trump Issue" are not *not* Trump nor our political present, but always already our collective pasts.

Activating Defiance

In the waning minutes of the third and final 2016 US presidential debate, Donald Trump muttered, "Such a nasty woman," into his microphone. Directed towards the Democratic presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton, the comment spurred instantaneous responses from the political left. 'Nasty woman' became a rallying cry, emblazoned on t-shirts and reappropriated by progressive elected officials, like Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts. "Get this, Donald," she stated at a campaign event for Clinton, "Nasty women are tough. Nasty women are smart. And nasty women vote." A similar gesture of re-appropriative defiance animated the Women's March, held on January 21, 2017. Challenging Trump's boast that he could do anything to women, including grabbing "them by the pussy" without consent, protestors carried signs proclaiming messages like "This pussy grabs back." While a host of resistant strategies and gestures emerged since Trump's ascendance that depend upon the logic of re-contextualizing his own words, "Not a Trump Issue" is interested in other ways of activating and historicizing defiance.

While this type of re-contextualization of epithets into activist rallying calls is valuable, "Not a Trump Issue" takes heed of prior historical moments in which fascist regimes rose to power. In an opinion piece authored for *The Guardian*, scholars Yuliya Komska and Michelle Moyd describe the extent to which the rhetoric of the Nazi party permeated the press and everyday conversation. Writers, attempting to counter the flowery and euphemistic double-speak of the Nazi regime, generated works that read more like lists. The very banality and straight-forwardness of the work aimed to puncture the genocide hidden within a phrase like, "the final solution." Komska and Moyd go on to argue that current leftist organizers need to develop their own "vocabulary of resistance," or, as they write in their co-authored essay here, "Appropriation is a tried-and-true resistance strategy, but it can result in mortgaged vocabularies, at best, if used exclusively."

The twelve pieces included in this issue engage with and extend beyond the conventional parameters of academic publishing. Several threads emerge across the issue: the role language holds in shaping knowledge, power, and perceptions of "truth"; the way power undergirds perceptions of identity, yet often goes unexamined; how affective responses are shaped by national events as much as by far more intimate interactions, like those forged in a university classroom; and a prevailing sense of uncertainty, encompassing at once hope and fear. Without negating the need to counter the sexist, racist rhetoric and policies of the current administration, each piece proposes a mode of resistance that, in some way, sidesteps Trump in responding to Trumpism. It is a call to resist and oppose as much as it is an imagining of alternatives to longstanding historical conditions.

A handful of essays focus on performance and the performative power of language and protest. In their essay, "Language Is a Public Thing," Komska and Moyd caution against, in these politically tumultuous times, the call of the manifesto. Instead they argue for a use of language that is "more inclusive, open-ended, solidary, moral, ethical, introspective, long lasting, binding, and action-oriented." They conclude their piece arguing we must "'think [about] what we are doing,' and saying, every day," finding ways to craft our everyday speech into modes of engagement that are cooperative and collaborative. This care for language, they note, "is everybody's business." Performance studies scholar Sheila Malone offers a close reading of the chartered motorcycle club, Dykes on Bikes. She theorizes the noise of bikes' exhaust pipes as a mode of sonic disruption that breaks through hegemonic and normative practices and policies. "Political positions, political messages," Malone writes, "and even policies are turned over through the tuning of air/exhaust systems." In her analysis of Oscar Arguello's play Sideways Fences (2017), Kimberly Chantal Welch reveals the way realist theatre's inherent slippage between reality and representation serves as a means of destabilizing normative and discriminatory stereotypes that attach to Latina/o communities. While she frames the

plot points of *Sideways Fences* through the Trump administration's continued attacks on communities of color and those in poverty in the United States, Welch notes that such conditions are not new, but rather precede Trump and, indeed, in many ways are constitute of the nation's founding. Such acts of, "domestic...terror against minorities are... not," as Welch reminds us, "shocking," nor are they new.

Ellen Gerdes, Christine Marks, Moustafa Bayoumi, and Sara Mitcho focus their contributions on questions of education, access, and academic and scholarly accountability. Beginning with the increasing castigation of "identity politics" by figures like Milo Yiannopoulos on university campuses, Gerdes explores the role of progressive pedagogy. Cognizant that "institutions of higher education ... [are] sites of ... deep-seated inequities," she, nevertheless, argues that, "we ... need to prioritize teaching itself as a political act." For Gerdes, drawing upon her training in dance studies, such political acts must leave room for embodied learning. Marks focuses her interview with Moustafa <u>Bayoumi</u> on the cultural studies scholar's perceptions of Trump's presidency some 178 days in. Ranging from Bayoumi's scholarly monographs to the administration's so-called Muslim Ban, the two discuss how cultural studies can allow for a "sober analysis" of what is "happening in the present." In her essay, ""Truth' in the Age of Trump," Sara Mitcho grapples with the tension between, on the one hand, critiquing positivism, long a theoretical and critical approach key to cultural studies, and, on the other hand, refuting Trump and his administration's barrage of lies and obfuscations. Her essay is, as she writes, "ultimately [a call] for cultural studies scholars . . . to resist the urge to set down the tools of critical theory but instead to apply them with abandon to Trump [and] his policies."

Ryan Blaine, Megan Wood, and Mimi Yang take up narratives that dominated the 2016 presidential election and the first year of the Trump administration. In their co-authored essay "Not About White Workers: The Perils of Popular Ethnographic Narrative in the Time of Trump," Blaine and Wood analyze a series of ethnographic texts that focus on working class, white Americans—the disenfranchised white voter much discussed in the aftermath of Trump's successful presidential bid. The two, however, analyze these texts not because of the narratives they offer about white America, but rather because, the two argue, such texts "tell us something about the formation of popular thought in relation to politics in the United States." Such narratives, they conclude, are inadequate both in explaining our contemporary moment and in "the task of imagining better political futures." In her piece, "The Trump Wall: a Cultural Wall and a Cultural War," scholar Mimi Yang mounts a transhistorical analysis, framing how Trump's use of the border wall during his campaign and into his presidency reveals not a groundswell of populist racism, but, instead, is woven into the discourses of American notions of freedom and democracy.

Finally, the issue includes a collection of responses from emerging and established artists. Chicano performance artist, photographer, director, and essayist Harry Gamboa Jr. offers a performative text entitled "Missives and Other Un-Notes." In a series of disorienting vignettes, Gamboa skewers myths of US national identity, masculinity, and whiteness, placing readers in a dystopic world of violence, surveillance, and the constant threat of annihilation. Accompanying his text are a series of photographs from his performance troupe Virtual Vérité (2005–2017), in which some hundred performers, in Gamboa's words, "hopscotch their way across the various crevices and cracks of systemic breakdown to simulate the shattering effects of societal collapse while playing in the streets." Carmen Wong offers documentation of her performance-installation, "teatthatwall, first presented at Rhizome DC (a DIY experimental art space in Takoma Park, Washington, DC) in April 2017. In the piece, Wong invited gallery-goers to assist her in the construction (and consumption) of a wall made from small rice bricks set with

refried bean mortar. Laurie Beth Clark and Michael Peterson discuss their piece "Rage, Grief, Comfort &" created through Spatula&Barcode, the social practice art collaboration the two founded. The project, which took place in December 2016, used foods like tomatoes, onions, potatoes, and sugar cookies to allow attendees to express their various affective responses to the results of the 2016 presidential election. Framing the project through a notion of slow politics, Clark and Peterson explore how social practice and food help inform our political present. Lindsay Garcia, an artist and PhD candidate in American Studies, offers the appropriated poem *No Pestilence at the Border* that details the "historical, rhetorical, and material entanglement" of rhetoric that links immigrations and pests in the United States.

There Wasn't Time

The last line of text that appeared in Greenberg's piece was, "There is more I wanted to do with this dance, but there wasn't time." It is a sentiment that, as poet and scholar Jaime Shearn Coan writes, "speaks to the on-going-ness of AIDS-related deaths." "There wasn't time," then, reminds us of the nearness of death and the how that nearness is too often tied to the precarity of marginalization. Greenberg's sentiment echoes the one on which I wish to end.

We are in a time—as we were in the 1990s in regards to the HIV/AIDS epidemic; as we were prior to 1973 when access to abortion services was restricted by state and federal law; as we were in 1970 in Los Angeles when some 30,000 people took to the streets for the Chicano Moratorium; as we were prior to 1965 and the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act when entry into the US was tied to one's nation of origin; as we were in 1942 when President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066; as we were throughout the height of the Jim Crow era, during which some 4,000 black men, women, and children were lynched; as we were beginning in the late nineteenth century when the US government forcibly removed native children from their families and placed them in boarding schools; as we were throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century when working conditions were unregulated in the US—in which a state of precarity is all too present and pressing for many. As the authors in this issue propose, and as this exhaustive aside aims to demonstrate, we have always been in this time. The US is a country, after all, founded on colonial conquest and bolstered by chattel slavery. An answer, for those of us privileged enough not to be continually marginalized and rendered criminal by the current administration, is not to be caught in what we might call "Trump time," a time of tweets and reactionary politics. Rather, the task of responding to racist, sexist, and violent ideologies does not end; it is an on-going practice and one that takes care, collaboration, noise, and empathy.

Notes

- 1. In his essay "'I don't know what made this "private" in the first place.': Neil Greenberg's Not-About-AIDS Dance," poet and scholar Jamie Shearn Coan notes the relationship between Powell's poetry collection and Greenberg's dance piece. Jamie Shearn Coan, "I don't know what made this "private" in the first place.': Neil Greenberg's Not-About-AIDS Dance," in *Lost and Found: Dance, New York, HIV/AIDS, Then and Now* (New York: Danspace Project, 2016), 235–247; D.A. Powell, *Tea* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), xi.
- 2. Yuliya Komska and Michelle Moyd, "Donald Trump is Changing Our Language. We Need a Language of Resistance," *The Guardian*, January 17, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/17/resist-donald-trump-vocabulary-resistance-rhetoric.

3. Coan, 246. 🔁

å Bio



Gwyneth Shanks

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Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

Language is a Public Thing

Yuliya Komska and Michelle Moyd

Part I. Against Manifestos

Manifestos are experiencing a rebirth. Some spur or foreground ongoing civic mobilization. Others claim to counter the perceived threats that civic mobilization generates. 1

From a figurehead of an artistic movement known for its commitment to utter nonsense comes perhaps the truest, briefest, and most candid assessment of how a manifesto works and why it fails. "To launch a manifesto," wrote the Dadaist Tristan Tzara,

you have to want: A. B. & C., and fulminate against 1, 2, & 3, work yourself up and sharpen your wings to conquer and circulate lower and upper case As, Bs & Cs, sign, shout, swear, organize prose into a form that is absolutely and irrefutably obvious, prove its ne plus ultra and maintain that novelty resembles life. $\frac{2}{}$

The manifesto was a grandiloquent, formulaic, presumptuous, rage-filled, and ultimately futile genre, Tzara offered. And yet, of course, he went on to pen yet another iteration of it —the Dada's second, at that. How could he not? The year was 1918, and the world had stopped making sense to many. The manifesto lured with the etymological promise to make things evident, clear.

Exactly one hundred years on, a political storm system of comparable proportions is lashing the coastline of the present. Again, nothing makes sense. And again, the manifesto is calling.

Is the call worth resisting? We argue that it is. Despite its many transformations, the fitful, rushed, revolution-fixated culture of manifesto-ing has not translated into sustainable use. The genre and its variations have outlived their purpose, making room for other forms of covenant that are more inclusive, open-ended, solidary, moral, ethical, introspective, long-lasting, binding, and action-oriented. Where the issue is language—consistently fetishized and just as consistently neglected—such alternatives are a necessity.

The following myths lay out some of the reasons for the shift away from the manifesto, lest it appear as an offhand dismissal of a genre.

The myth of wiping the slate clean. Manifestos traffic in deconstructive or even destructive propositions. They tell us that we need to change something, improve something, redirect something—often forgetting to take note of what, if anything, is worthy of preservation or what might already exist to move things forward. Some take it

to extremes, espousing the language of purges and purity. Tommaso Marinetti's "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," a classic example, speaks of war as "the world's only hygiene." Other rallying cries anticipate visceral tears in the social fabric. In one of the best-known of the genre, "The Communist Manifesto," Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels speak of a "most radical rupture" with the established patterns of the bourgeois order. Manifestos, to borrow from Marinetti and his artist kin again, pit "futurism" against "passeism," as if abolishing the past itself or wiping the slate clean were viable options.

Conversely, manifestos can be throwbacks to pasts that never were or, worse, pasts that ought to be consigned to memory for good. Even then, they are mislabeled as forward-looking missives. In March 2017, to name an example, the neo-Nazi Vanguard America's so-called "Vanguard Manifesto" appealed to "the immutable truths of Blood and Soil" to "preserv[e] and uphol[d] the natural order that binds us," i.e., the racist order. Sliding back in time, the writ conveniently seized Emersonian "self-reliance" from the individual, for whom it had originally been intended, and attached it to a collective.

The myth of the pre-existing collective. Preempting a collective is the manifesto's other weakness. The first person plural prevails, presuming that the "we" is already existent and not merely emergent, as is usually the case. (Or, to take an Arendtian view, that individuals are *plural*, acting in different capacities when they enter and leave different spaces, whether literal or figurative. Manifestos thus carry on as doubly utopian fantasies: they fathom some radical rupture, then conjure up the phantom community behind it. Covering up the community's actual absence, usually poorly, are the overstated references to the Other—that is, the opposition to be toppled. For Marx and Engels it is the bourgeoisie. For the fascist Vanguard America, it is the imaginary "Jew" of global capitalism. The "we," it follows, is defined not positively, in descriptions of what it is, but negatively, in lists of what it is not. Who are "we"? The question remains up in the air, just as the vaunted community, fuzzy and elusive, lacks personal commitment on behalf of those who are not the manifesto's author(s).

Collective action is undoubtedly among the highest of pursuits in troubled times. The promotion of collective ideology over conscience, however, leaves little room for individual responsibility, or even for the first-person singular as a committed, interested actor. Any ideology, writes Václav Havel, only resembles "the repository of something supra-personal and objective" but really "enables people to deceive their conscience and conceal their true position $[\dots]$ from both the world and from themselves." $\frac{10}{100}$

In short, manifestos don't commit anyone to doing anything, although exceptions are not out of the question. Naomi Klein's "The Leap Manifesto" has drawn thousands of individual and collective online signatories, all of whom pledge to act in the interest of environmental sustainability and to intervene in the processes that have created the destructive juggernaut known as climate change. 11 Still, their high number poses the question of what this volume of signatures means in the age of the online petition, when expression of solidarity is an easy click away. Petition-signing leaves one with the illusion of having acted, whereas proper action demands the sacrifice of many individuals' time and labor.

The myth of clear weaponized language. Manifestos' common formulas, at which Tzara's parody hints, converge on demands and wishes but offer, all too often, few practical pieces of advice about the steps to be taken. Vagueness pervades them. One example is "we demand" and "we want" in "The Leap Manifesto," which starts with the premise that "Canada is facing the deepest crisis in recent memory," evident in environment, labor, indigenous rights, infrastructure, and agriculture. The chorus on whose behalf Klein writes must "welcome refugees and migrants"; it "need[s] the right policies" for the

society's sweeping transformation; and it will, at town hall meetings, "gather to democratically define what a genuine leap to the next economy means in their communities." But how exactly—and what role the moral core of the Leap agenda, i.e., the indigenous peoples of Canada get to play in the making of "whatever possible communities"—remains unannounced. 12

Finally, manifestos often resort to metaphorical language derived from war, the "call to arms" being a foremost staple. *The History Manifesto*, for example, makes this point about history's ability to connect the past with the future: "The sword of history has two edges, one that cuts open new possibilities in the future, and one that cuts through the noise, contradictions, and lies of the past." Historians, the authors go on, must "combat the short-termism of our time" in order to help solve its thorniest conundrums. Haken in isolation, *The History Manifesto*'s belligerent idiom is innocuous enough. But when government employees go "ballistic" and politicians routinely refer to disruptions of longstanding procedural norms as "the nuclear option," combativeness easily becomes the lowest common denominator—not to say a cornerstone—of *all* political language. And yet, what sort of individuals or communities can emerge out of combat? How whole can they be?

Part II. Make Room for Language

Language is a shared resource. Tellingly, whatever their vagueness and their debt to the generic conventions, the writings that still label themselves "manifestos" are perhaps unintentionally beginning to implode the form from within. Klein's *The Leap Manifesto* takes root in the clearly outlined values ("respect for Indigenous rights, diversity, and environmental stewardship") rather than a moral vacuum, in deep-seated indigenous knowledge rather than upended or invented paradigms, in attempted sustainability of the call itself (extended to an online petition with all individual and collective signatories' names visible) rather than its diffusion in the unknowable readers' mass. Crucial is not the genre itself but the means for harnessing civic sensibilities for the long haul.

Along similar lines, academics have also undertaken some concrete steps, forming cross-disciplinary environmentalist alliances to commit to, conduct, and archive actual research on the ties between humans and across species. These alliances leave room for individual responsibility, make plans to repair rather than simply criticize, and invoke "moral imagination" to fuel scientific and scholarly inquiry. 15 Steeped in ethics, introspection, and collaboration, their pledges echo dissident charters more than manifestos.

For centuries, charters have shaped the top-down concession and protection of liberties, from England's Magna Carta (1215) to the African Charter on Human Rights and People's Rights (1981), the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000), and beyond. Their bottom-up history may have shorter timelines but no less meaningful consequences.

It was only in 1838 that the worker-propelled People's Charter catalyzed and sustained a movement for more democracy in Britain over nearly two decades. Since then, key has been chartism's twentieth-century turn to existing realities worthy of reanimation, instead of utopias evoked by manifestos. The seminal Cold War-era Charter 77, initiated in Czechoslovakia in the year 1977, centered on values—human rights and civil liberties—ostensibly espoused but egregiously trampled by the state. "Many fundamental civil rights for the time being are—unhappily—in our country valid only on paper," the text states. 16 For this reason, its text, in contrast to preceding and subsequent top-down charters, consisted "in its entirety of quotations of passages from the State Constitution." Arising from "the background of solidarity and friendship" and fighting the state with its own

tools, Charter 77 vowed to serve "the general interest" rather than some clear-cut "opposition political activity." 18 It did not set out to be antagonistic to the state. In fact, as the signatory Václav Černý noted, "the authorities nicknamed it dissidence" in order to brand it as subversive and thus illicit. 19 Instead, the authors of the charter were holding the state accountable for unfulfilled promises. The document, Černý explained, was "an appeal to people's consciences and a call for words to mean what they say. What it does aspire to is to create a general awareness of the need for justice for all, and to encourage citizens to voice this demand. [. . .] Its aim is to shake consciousnesses, not the constitution. Its strength is derived solely from the morality of its cause in the face of lies, subterfuge, manipulation of people and the hegemony of police power." 20

Being both "partly forgotten" and "alive and well" is Charter 77's paradoxical legacy. It didn't depose Czechoslovakia's government, and neither did it seek to. However, it did break the wave of resignation and cynicism about to submerge the citizenry and created "a civil society composed not of ideological adherents but of [truth-seeking] individuals." 21 Leaning into self-scrutiny, awareness, quiet morality, the emphasis on the language of rights as a shared resource, and away from the much louder panic, seizure of power, and pathos of lofty ideals, this brand of chartism has outlived the Cold War. It inspired activists the world over, including those who authored one of the most significant civic documents of our time, China's Charter 08.22 The circumstances of its fruition were strikingly familiar. Like Czechoslovakia prior to 1977, China "signed two important international human rights conventions [in 1998]; in 2004 it amended its constitution to include the phrase 'respect and protect human rights'; and [...] in 2008, it has promised to promote a 'national human rights action plan'," "Unfortunately," the late Liu Xiaobo and his fellow dissidents summed up, "most of this political progress has extended no further than the paper on which it is written." Changing a system with a "constitution but no constitutional government" was "no longer optional," they ventured.

Chartism may seem too modest, unambitious, conciliatory, and amorphous. It can come across as regenerative more than generative, per se: it recycles instead of creating something anew. For the same reasons, however, it might be *the* much-needed sober, realistic, and, again, sustainable mode for communicating across social divides and polarities and for putting "civic spirit into practice," per Charter 08—in the interest of all.

How to apply this to language? Much like human dignity, language is "not bestowed by the state," to quote the Charter 08 signatories. Unlike human dignity, language must first be acquired from some second party that is, as a rule, private: a family member, a neighbor, a caretaker. The polity's deferred intervention in its citizenry's linguistic lives is especially palpable in the United States, which—too few people seem to realize—lacks a nation-wide official language (or languages) and an attendant national language policy. Only select states, thirty-one and counting, have succeeded in legalizing some such measures.

By and large, as many rightly point out, the national language-policy vacuum has been a boon, and the reasons are simple enough. Whenever the question of language appears on the nation's political agenda, the discussions inevitably drift toward discriminatory English-only laws that will potentially violate minorities' labor rights and hamper their opportunities for educational advancement. Prom the Founding Fathers (John Adams' attempt to create an English-language academy in 1780, Benjamin Franklin's well-known anxieties over the predominance of German in Pennsylvanian politics, and Noah Webster's fretting over the distinction between British and American Englishes) to the so-called Sedition Act of 1918 (Pub.L. 65–150, 40 Stat. 553) and the many Congressional votes on language matters, the emphasis has been on the restrictive and exclusive use of the (American) English language rather than the enfranchising and inclusive use of civic or public language.

Are these two not the same thing? Should they be? Why? And by what means? Is America's public language (as little as such a thing exists) necessarily a monolingual construct? Furthermore, must it be English? Where do other individual language rights factor in, as they ought to according to Article 27 of the United Nations' International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights? (It reads, "[i]n those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.") And, if America's public language is more than just a specific version of English, does the alternative make room for monolinguals or for those who know but do not meaningfully use other languages in their daily lives?

The uncertainty about the answers, and the fact that these questions are seldom posed outside the pages of academic journals, exposes a flip side of the supposed felicity of the nation's linguistic blind spot. The absence of a language policy also means that the citizenry talks about *language* very little even as concerns about individual *words* mount. In the limelight are Words of the Year, local and regional words threatened with endangerment, words excised from official use and research agendas by decree, the conservative and right-wing media's *ad hoc* semanticide. Meanwhile, "civic language" is hardly a catch phrase or even an item of public debate, and certainly not part of any recent "literacy" fad, which have included "computer literacy," "visual literacy," or "media literacy." The circumstance that English fails to differentiate between language *as a tongue* (on par with Spanish, Tagalog, Arabic, or others) and *a universal human faculty* only worsens the predicament. 26

All this, some might object, is an insurmountable obstacle to the kind of grassroots chartism that could boost America's language activism, broadly defined. Supplement "human rights" with "language," and the chartist edifice crumbles quickly—at least on American soil. How does one fight the state with its own weapons—its documented but unfulfilled commitments to language, in this case—if they don't exist? How does one use the state's language (to talk about language) if the state provides nothing to quote on the matter? How does one reanimate realities that haven't even been animated yet?

These are valid objections. Still, to suggest that a language charter is an impossibility would be to take chartism too literally. The chartist formula is much less specific and presumes, to attempt a gross reduction, two conditions. The first is that the state and the opposition share the same resource. The second is that the state's action to safeguard and foster this shared resource is inadequate or absent and thus requires a civic intervention.

Both conditions apply. Language *is* a shared resource: no matter how much people (ourselves included) wish to talk about it without as much as a mention of Trump or others like him, that would be impossible. And the government does do little or nothing to support this resource by championing a more multilingual political culture, promoting a wide variety of language-focused school curricula (from rhetoric to multilingual education), funding the development of accessible experimental learning materials, and so forth. Civil society must step in to put the public—and not just a white Anglophone public in command of a standard—back into "public language."

Though it remains unnamed thus far, this process has slowly begun. An action-conscious language of gradual covenant-building is now gaining traction, and it is chartist at its core. The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) platform provides a model for communicating in the chartist key, imbued with practicable action language, suggestions for taking action, and background policy briefs to inform it. An excerpt reads, "We have come together now because we believe it is time to forge a new covenant. We are dreamers and doers and this

platform is meant to articulate some of our vision."²⁷ Hyperlinks take the reader to six paths to action to "provide the stepping-stones and roadmaps" to their vision.²⁸ The reference to a "covenant"—a "solemn, binding agreement," in Merriam-Webster's definition—speaks to a level of commitment beyond what typically accompanies online petitions. The self-designation as "dreamers and doers" points to the need for long-term creativity, inclusivity, and purposefulness to address the multifaceted and deadly challenges facing black communities. Though language is not highlighted as a concern here, it is clear that the platform writers have taken great care of language in shaping the movement's direction and goals.

With less immediacy, other new charter-like writings have begun to reflect on language as the inescapable medium of mobilization and communication—even as other mediums, with more reliance on the visual, the haptic, and the sonic, continue to play key parts. The next step is realizing that all language—not just public language ("the language we use when we discuss politics and policy")—is a concern for all people: not only all Americans and certainly not only the elites or ethnic minorities, as is too often the case. 29 It is the cause that transcends the boundaries of education, class, race, gender, geography, profession, and, as unimaginable as this may be, political beliefs. Specific instances of language usage—and of individual tongues—will always remain a partisan issue. However, concern with language as such should not.

The present challenge is then not to aspire to save the day with sporadic rescue plans and manifestos, but seed the lasting conditions, personal and social/structural, when language is not constantly experienced as endangered.

Language is more than a tool. America's official linguistic gap has already been noted. The public sphere, too, has perpetuated its fair share of occlusions. Despite the often detailed arguments for or against such obviously linguistic areas as semantics—the recent 45 Ways to Fight Trump begins with a paragraph on the distinction between "opposition" and "resistance"—many of today's blueprints for the way forward make little room for language as a proper cause. 30 They call on their readers to fight for justice, minority and labor rights, education, immigration, religious liberties—but not for language. To say that language remains instrumental in society is thus a double entendre. On the one hand, it acknowledges that language is an indispensable vehicle for agreement and opposition, solidarities, calls to action, claims, promises, policies, love, and hate. On the other hand, it also presumes that language is only a vehicle, necessitating elaborate arguments to prove that it in "itself [is] worthy of close attention." Like an abiding holdover from the pre-Enlightenment paradigm, within which secular culture claimed little or no autonomy (from the ecclesiastical domain), currently language can always only exist in the service of something else. 32 Its importance as such is not self-evident, and the belief that language won't save us—"fretting over the state of language seems like an indulgence," Louis Menand critically observes in *The New Yorker*—is deeply entrenched. 33

In short, language, in the singular and also in the plural, is an enticing but ultimately unpopular agenda. It is a topic that delights with quirks and amusing anecdotes, as many a blog attests. $\frac{34}{1}$ It appeals with the promise of power, money, health, and other neoliberal "advantages," according to the popular defenses of bi- and multilingualism. $\frac{35}{1}$ It irritates with failings in the political arena, where it perennially remains "in a bad way," to default to George Orwell's formulation. $\frac{36}{1}$ At the same time, discussions of language, even those with action as their main objective, are often seen as too theoretical, ivory-tower, remote from practice.

The abiding centrality of the word and its power to hurl entire nations into a state of existential terror has been patently obvious since Donald Trump's election. Between the

oxymoronic "beautiful wall" and the hyperbolic "fire and fury," Trump's idiom has captured a great, not to say disproportionate, amount of attention. Its extensive scrutiny by linguists, translators, and journalists may have yielded some useful insights, but it has also created preconditions for linguistic amnesia with regard to everyone else's expression. The panic around Trump's idiom has so far done little to recalibrate language for all those who are not Trump, to make its shared nature obvious. And that, in turn, has failed to stave off the oncoming waves of panic about politics, international or domestic, addling thought and standing in the way of action.

Meantime, for better or worse, language remains vital to assent and dissent within all political parties, all civic responses—the protests, petitions, and data rescue—and journalism. What are the templates for envisioning sustainable language use that will serve longer-term solutions instead of flickering as one-off reactions to each day's new crises and the short-term thinking that these incessant crises and "shock events" generate? It is true that preaching is easier than practicing. But preaching, too, is a kind of practice.

After all, perhaps the most widely discussed, best-known speech acts come from oratory traditions. Though often the province of political luminaries, in the US this tradition is also linked to religious communities. One way to think about what language is and what it can do in difficult times is to think of its capacities for expressing "moral dissent"—a purposeful "look[ing] forward toward the vision of what we know we were made to be."

Setbacks will inevitably happen, but rather than experiencing these as final defeats, moral dissenters can use them to reassess their strategies and tactics.

Bldentifying specific shared language practices and commitments can help build enduring "fusion coalitions" that are dynamic, nimble, and responsive to sustained expression of dissent that see past the next election cycle and into an extended future of engagement and change.

Above all, it can redefine "public language" as something that is firmly in the public domain, and not something that is exclusive to politicians and policy-making per se.

Language needs long-term care and commitment. It is significant that Timothy Snyder's bestselling *On Tyranny* allots three of its twenty chapters to language care. The maxims are simple: "be kind to our language," "make eye contact and small talk," and "listen for dangerous words." Each gestures towards the everyday language choices that inform human interactions, well outside elite political or academic circles. They matter precisely because they are the stuff of building communities, coalitions, collectives that may be rooted in neighborhoods, workplaces, public spaces, associational life, arts venues, and so on. Snyder's book is not a manifesto: importantly, it is a self-help manual for those trying to resist in their myriad small ways, including through conscious language choices that refuse to let the state into their most intimate, communal, social, and activist spaces. These are also the spaces where organizing happens, away from the authorities' scrutiny, away from the bombast of official and corporate messaging, away from the chaos of the twenty-four-hour news cycle that is so unkind to language, and so complicit in its reckless use. 41

After Trump's failure to condemn racist violence across the US alienated some Republican voters in the summer of 2017, the everyday language choices are also theirs to pursue. The reality of language care is no longer about manifesto-style proclamations for niche audiences or vocabularies handed from the top down but the question of what words (or, in the case of sign language, gestures or facial expressions) to choose, why, where, and when—and how to string them into thoughts that make sense to more than their originator. It is a reality where the balance between self-help (or self-reliance) and community-building is of the essence.

The task here is to outline and commit to a practice of language that avoids the pathos, the needless inflation of concepts (of the "call to arms" variety), the trite metaphors, the inertia, the unaccountability for the spoken. If militancy does have a place in the suggested routines—memorably, renowned Kenyan author, scholar, and activist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has described himself as a "language warrior" standing up for a versatile "languageverse"—it is a lasting, perhaps lifelong mission that requires focus. 42 It is not a question of signing a petition and forgetting.

Rather than reinventing the wheel, or "committing a social science crime" by ignoring those who have long been engaged in everyday language care, it is important to recognize the disruptive potential of language work that has gone on below the radar all along. 43 Indigenous language preservation efforts, to cite an example, provide resources for Native American multilingualism in the face of encroaching monolingualism and English hegemony. 44 Linguists continue to study and advocate for the legitimacy of African-American Vernacular English (popularly known as Black English) as a variant of American English with significant historical and cultural value and validity. 45 Broadcasters have slowly begun to recognize accents and languages previously considered non-standard: NPR's news shows feature commentators from Spanish-speaking Univision, and the BBC has a new West African Pidgin service—a significant recognition of the area's large, cosmopolitan, diasporic population, and also a recognition that there are many Englishes, not just one (BBC) norm. Leading newspapers keep a rare spotlight on the potential of Spanish in Trump's America to express dissent already by dint of surviving, changing, and thriving. 46

Cultivating language awareness and care must not require invention of new or more extensive lexicons, although in some cases—as the 2017 media reporting on climate change and sexual harassment proves—the existing vocabularies can be woefully inadequate. While it draws attention to words that do harm across registers, high and low, vertically and horizontally, language care does so not to police them, but to illustrate why they do harm and in what contexts. Its arsenal, if any, is non-propagandistic soft power that proffers occasions for changing one's mind voluntarily. It calls for noticing when language leads astray or, conversely, when it kindles inspiration.

Part III. Orwell Is Not Holy

Much of this might call to mind George Orwell's influential yet stubbornly unheeded "Politics and the English Language." And in a way, it does. Divided into sections, the essay works up to the program of improvement "at the verbal end" that's almost too familiar to be quoted:

- 1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- 2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- 3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- 4. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- 5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- 6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous. 47

At its core is a plea for clarity and simplicity. Self-reflexively, the agent is also the main target. Introspection and self-scrutiny are central. To this day, the essay is considered a benchmark for language care, a timeless document "squarely in our path," "asking all the right questions." 48 And yet, how timeless is it?

The public has changed, and language—public and other—has changed with it. Of course, many of Orwell's dire warnings against hackneyed metaphors, meaningless words, or suspended agency, collected in a lifetime of experiencing and observing totalitarianisms and war, make for urgent reading. However, language use is predicated as much on continuities as on changes. The present-day vantage point reveals the lasting appeal of "Politics and the English Language" while at the same time spotlighting its shibboleths.

Re-reading Orwell in 2018 suggests that some of his prescriptions are part of the problem more than they are the solution. It is not simply that Orwell's is a "joyless campaign in favour of [...] 'plain English', quirk-free and standard-issue," as *The Guardian*'s Steven Poole offers. ⁴⁹ The more significant stumbling block is a conflict within his attitudes to linguistic simplicity. On the one hand, he engages with the potential of Basic English, a radical simplification of English designed in 1929 by the psycholinguist Charles K. Ogden as his contribution to international peace. In the final analysis though, Orwell was repelled enough by it that it inspired Newspeak in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. ⁵⁰ Simplified and reductionist is Orwellian for "bad." On the other hand, the writer's very own essay performs some very counterintuitive pirouettes of "linguistic xenophobia" by excising borrowed words as tokens of a "slovenly" and "pretentious, Latinized style." ⁵¹ It simplifies and reduces, enacting—and, knowing the author, this takes a real leap of faith to imagine—a linguistic version of the body politic. Stealthily, purity and purism become Orwell's own fascistic blind spots, where the lonely English-wranglers can supposedly find solace in a national, and possibly even nationalist, herd.

"There is no real need for any of the hundreds of foreign phrases now current in the English language," Orwell writes, in stark contrast to the passionate (at times too passionate) embrace of such borrowings by their defenders. Theodor W. Adorno admired, also not self-reflexively, "words from abroad" as "seductive" escorts. 52 And yet, they were not merely his erotic companions. In them, the philosopher saw signs of linguistic self-consciousness and, recalling World War I-era bouts of purism, resistance against the "muddled stream" of conformism. 53 More than anything, they did prosthetic work where "pure" language broke down; they were reason where emotion failed: "The foreign word [...] flushes the outlines of knowledge, rigorous and unambiguous, out of the mass of language." 54

The lexicon of 2016 and 2017 revealed many such red flags. On the one hand, the rightwing chant "Lügenpresse" (German for "lying press") emerged as a clear harbinger of the initially unlikely-seeming, transhistorical interfaces between Nazism and now. On the other hand, such terms as "kleptocracy" and "kakistocracy" have been indispensable for exposing the new American government's undemocratic, mercantilist, and nepotistic streaks. But there is another promise in Adorno's enchantment with foreign words—a promise that Americans (and, perhaps, other English-speakers) have yet to discover. It is "the power of an unknown, genuine language that is not open to any calculus, a language that arises only in pieces and out of the disintegration of the existing one; this negative, dangerous, yet assuredly promised power is the true justification of foreign words." For this reason, much of what follows hinges on the not-so-foreign foreign words—this integral part of "our English," the kind that was not yet Orwell's.

Part IV. The Language Care Charter

A. Care for language

In The Human Condition (1958), Hannah Arendt pointed to action as a generative force:

What I propose [...] is a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears. This,

obviously, is a matter of thought, and thoughtlessness—the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of "truths" which have become trivial and empty—seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time. What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing. $\frac{56}{}$

In the aftermath of the first space satellite's launch in 1957, Arendt's inspiration came from the beginnings of the space race, when it appeared that humanity was no longer earth-bound. Her philosophy of action, which emphasizes human plurality as a source, invites a re-imagining of human (despite the then-conventional designation "man") potential through language. "Wherever the relevance of speech is at stake," she writes, "matters become political by definition, for speech is what makes man a political being." 57

In that spirit, we commit to the following Language Care Charter and encourage others to join us. It suggests ways to "think what we are doing," and saying, every day. Charters are short documents, meant to be read in one breath. Of course, the following roster of points is hardly exhaustive. Rather, it amounts to an "open work" that is there not simply to be received but to be expanded, contested, or amended by those who volunteer as language activists—which, ideally if unrealistically, should include all citizens.

B. Own your language

Language is irreducible to a possession, some argue. There is "no natural property of language," Jacques Derrida chided naive believers in its wholesale appropriation or expropriation. 58 However, it is difficult to convince people in societies that rest on individualism to tend to something that they don't see as their own in some way.

Language ownership can take many shapes. There is no one-size-fits-all mold. Choose to nurture, as Joseph Brodsky put it, "extreme individualism, originality of thinking, whimsicality, even—if you will—eccentricity. That is, something that can't be feigned, faked, imitated." 59

Or else, opt for communal vocabularies, incorporating "mutuality without hierarchy" into everyday speech: cooperation, coordination, collaboration, reciprocity. 60. These words won't summon shared realities where these aren't in existence—language is no all-powerful force, and its ability to shape reality, most linguists concur, is notable yet relatively modest—but they will reflect and reinforce them where it is the case.

Do "fusion politics." 61 Adopt liberatory and action-oriented language; reject that which is restrictive or oppressive.

Reclaim important words that have lost their worth due to persistent "abuse of language," as Noam Chomsky puts it. They do not have to be "vulgar propaganda exercises." "Freedom" or "democracy" can be imbued with meanings that serve the interests of more than just wealthy elites, the political class, partisan rhetoric, or ideology.

Use caution when appropriating or parodying the opponents' words by dint of repetition. Appropriation is a tried-and-true resistance strategy, but it can result in mortgaged vocabularies, if used exclusively.

Be skeptical about the artificial boundaries that institutions and individuals tend to draw between different types of language—private and public, or poetic and political. Audre Lorde's "poetry is not luxury" is a dictum to live by. 63

C. Reflect on language

Resist "political correctness" as a frame for discussing language choices. Words have meaning, word choices matter, and applying the label "political correctness" to language attentiveness is counter-productive, stifling discussion. When accusations of "political correctness" fly, it means the accusers are trying to forestall deeper thought about the common, unquestioned words and concepts that appear in daily usage. Often, these disavow the humanity of others. There is nothing politically correct about taking care in choosing language that honors humanity in its plurality.

Fight for the words you want. Reject the words you don't want. Have reasons for either case, and be prepared to explain it to yourself, and to others.

If a word generalizes, collapses identities, or masks conflict, think about what it is doing, what social or cultural conditions make this possible, and what exactly vanishes in its usage.

Distrust language. A convention it remains, to be sure, but a shapeshifting one. Meanings and emotions that users impute to words and phrases change constantly. Be cognizant of the changes afoot.

If a word makes you uncomfortable, sit with it. Then ask yourself why. Decide if or how to use it based on what answers emerge.

Words aren't inherently good or bad. Users invest them with powers and connotations. Linguistic relativity, as linguists have described "a range of alternative ways in which language might have significant effects on thought," is only meaningful in the context of human interactions. 64 When using language, consider your own biases, choices, and habits first.

Words can gang up on their abusers, commentators like *The New York Times* 'Timothy Egan imagine, and avenge. 65 And yet, they won't do so by themselves—without humans manipulating them.

Words, or rather people who wield them, can kill. Neuroscientists have proven that verbal stress has long-term physical effects, and thinking before speaking is the best form of prevention. $\frac{66}{}$

Like appropriation, irony and snark are widespread expressions of dissent. But they aren't tantamount to action, especially in societies where people are free to act.

To speak with Arendt in mind, words and actions ought to align. It is easy to *say* "je suis X," much harder to *be* whatever X is.

D. Inhabit a languageverse

Acknowledge the "languageverse" in which you live—your neighborhood, city, country. Linguistic monocultures do not exist, even in settings that appear monolingual.

Think about language in both senses: as a tongue and as a human faculty. The latter necessarily implies that your tongue isn't the only one. Language, in this case, by necessity presumes "languages."

Question the ongoing resurgence of the term "the Anglosphere" as a designation for post-Brexit Anglophone solidarities. ⁶⁷ Alliances predicated on the use of a single language, no matter how international, exclude as much as they include. Often imperceptibly for the majority, "the Anglosphere" entrenches English-only mentalities.

How monolingual are you—and what is monolingual, really? Ideally, this ought to be the linguistic version of checking your privilege.

Train yourself to recognize the ways in which assumptions about language access and other kinds of access limit possibilities for participation, and work to open those spaces up to all. At stake are not only ethnic minority languages but also various sign languages, Braille, and even some constructed languages.

Perform small but personally meaningful acts of multilingualism within a single language, by code-switching, shifting between different speech and gestural registers, using dialect or even jargon to convey affiliations rather than exclude, relying on foreign borrowings to accentuate the message rather than show off. Speaking a single language isn't fated to remain monolingual.

Keep an open mind about foreign words. Ask about the pros and cons of their circulation in each case. They are, as other words, indifferent—neither good, nor bad. One some occasions, they channel misplaced pathos and needless obfuscation, along the lines of Orwell's warning—even Nazi language, it is worth remembering, had a place for them. On others, they alert to the tears in the social fabric—the rifts that have not healed, precluding a given word's full incorporation. Alternatively, they are alluring pathways into foreign worlds—and into making these worlds more than just "foreign." "Tolerance for ambiguity," as linguists dub this effect, has the ability to shape global citizens.

Consider multilingualism as a possible norm, which it had been for centuries before early modern statesmen and scholars decided that national languages were a good idea. It *is* the norm in other countries and on other continents—and on many street corners in the US.

Treat all languages equally, whether they are common or not, whether they have writing systems or not, whether they can be spoken or not. This matters in everyday agendas of education—where students increasingly choose between coding, sign language, or the living/dead languages—and communication.

Whether you are a lay user, an academic, a writer, or an editor, honor other language's special characters and diacritical marks. The signature font or lack of experience are no excuse.

Be curious about the capacities and histories of other languages, including those used by persons with disabilities. They have a lot to teach about various kinds of struggle—as its microcosms, not merely vehicles.

Think of language and languages as more than the good-for-you pills improving your career chances, maximizing cognitive and health benefits, or boosting global mobility. Languages are essential for communication and understanding—the purposes that are never purely selfish.

Honor how others speak, and recognize what they are able to hear or feel differently because they are operating in a second language, or a marginalized language, or a sign language.

People speaking multiple languages have multiple personalities—this is not a disorder. Make an effort to meet and respect each one of them, yourself included.

Address people as they prefer to be addressed—make the effort, every time. Spell their names correctly, including using the appropriate diacritical marks and accents.

E. Honor precision

Judgements and perceptions are subjective. Still, some things do not "seem to be"—they "are."

Moral relativism spreads linguistically. Be sparing with the word "both."

Reserve superlatives for those rare occasions when they are indispensable.

Hyperbole is a strategic rhetorical device, not a colloquialism to use liberally.

Language, like most other things, has a history. Beware of such ill-informed clichés and descriptors as "banana republic," "Communist dictatorship," or even "Nazi" and the related coinages ("feminazi," "grammar Nazi," etc.).

Beware of platitudes: "this is not us" "America. 2017." "This is not normal." Such free-floating phrases can breed non-committal political detachment that passes as outrage.

Make new words if the world, or your world, changes.

Ask about grammar and the reasons to bring school grammar instruction back. It is difficult to develop critical thinking without understanding of how thoughts cohere, what renders them persuasive, manipulative, objective, or lyrical. Diagramming sentences has surely outlived its heyday, but there is more than one way to teach grammar.

Learning grammar is not about vassalage to rigid (and monolingual) rules and standards. It is about figuring out what rules can and should be broken to contribute new kinds of civic language and political expression.

Not all experiences are entitled to being conveyed in the same words. Avoid word inflation and concede to the hardest-hit the words that best describe their conditions, exercising discipline with such terms as "survivor," "slave," "racism," "hero," and others in this vein. Overuse can expropriate language, leaving those who need it the most with little or nothing.

Examine language that makes you panic, or language that evokes moral panic. In conversations about violence, specifically, ask why verbal expressions of the same phenomena trigger more anxiety when they come from one source but not another. What is behind the double standard—after all, isn't it "words, words, words" on all sides?

F. Build the infrastructure

Attentiveness to language is no accident but a bedrock of everyday life. It coheres not in top-down mandates or compulsory training but in the encouragement to develop intimate bonds with words that children can foster well into adulthood. As things stand, the teaching of English in America is, in essence, a less-than-democratic process. By and large, it professes an inflexible approach to what is "right" or "wrong" and remains disconnected from other languages that mean a great deal to millions of Americans. The question of change, however, need not be one of sweeping educational reforms (untenable as they are at present) but of changing attitudes and taking small steps, in the spirit of chartism.

In conclusion, we offer several key changes that America's social structures—in particular, individual families, schools and universities, churches, the media—can implement at little or no cost:

- 1. Early childhood: Play with words and accents. Use words from more than one dialect or language. Language is fun and personal; language helps develop emotional bonds and is imbued with emotion; language is manipulable—for good and bad. Children can develop a sense of this early on, with the help of intergenerational family conversations, meeting neighbors, reading (from Shel Silverstein's poetry to #WeNeedDiverseBooks lists), or watching PBS Kids productions where other languages are spoken. Even as immersive bilingual education remains a privilege accessible to the very few, some resources are always already there.
- 2. **School age:** There is more than one way to write. Writing creatively—in a variety of forms—is essential for developing a connection to language and a sense of ownership

- of and accountability for one's words. Question the tyranny of the 3–5-paragraph essay. In addition, question an exclusive emphasis on writing. Oral storytelling matters, especially as a possible pathway to one's own roots and the roots of other cultures. It rebuilds storytelling communities, not just as they used to exist but as they can exist in the future.
- 3. Adults: Accept other Englishes, from Black English to the versions spoken in immigrant communities, as legitimate versions that have a place in all interactions. Presume that there are as many ways to speak and write most other languages that you encounter. Doing otherwise perpetuates homogenization and the burdensome and alienating rituals of ethnic and racial passing in college, at the workplace, and in the media that people consume daily. America isn't sentenced to remaining "a Babel in reverse," as a linguist put it, devouring other languages with no impact on English. 70

Already the transitory chronicler of America's fledgling democracy Alexis de Tocqueville observed in the 1830s that language is "the first instrument of thought," thus the "influence [of] the democratic social state and democratic institutions" on language is mutual. Language, he suggested in a special chapter of *Democracy in America*, is a constituent of the republic, looming large among the *res publica*, Latin for "public things." Americans must treat it as such: a public thing.

Notes

- 1. In the first rubric, see, for example, Katherine Gibson et al., "Manifesto for Living in the Anthropocene," *Manifesto for Living in the Anthropocene* (New York: Punctum Books, 2015); Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge University Press, 2014); Naomi Klein, "The Leap Manifesto: A Call for a Canada Based on Caring for the Earth and One Another," *No Is Not Enough* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017). In the second, see "Google's Ideological Echo Chamber," reprinted in Kate Conger, "Exclusive: Here's The Full 10-Page Anti-Diversity Screed Circulating Internally at Google," Gizmodo, August 5,
 - 2017, http://gizmodo.com/exclusive-heres-the-full-10-page-anti-diversity-screed-1797564320; and "American Fascism," in "Vanguard America," Everipedia, accessed on August 20, 2017, https://everipedia.org/wiki/vanguard-america/#ixzz4gKCDY8Qn
- 2. Tristan Tzara, "The 2nd DADA Manifesto," translator unknown (1918), Art History Archive, accessed on August 17, 2017, http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/dada/Dada-Manifesto.html.
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å Bio



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Sheila Malone, "The Politics and Policy of Noise: Motorcycles Making, Masking, and Muddling the Noise of Protest," *Lateral 6.2* (2017).

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Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

The Politics and Policy of Noise: Motorcycles Making, Masking, and Muddling the Noise of Protest

Sheila Malone

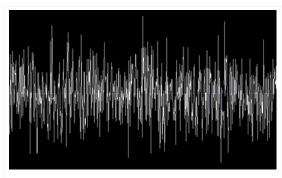


Fig. 1. Sheila Malone, White Noise

Introduction: Tuning Noise

With the inauguration of the 45th President of the United States, Donald J. Trump, an infusion of visual, aural, and public activism has arisen in America. Protest, public outcry, and political speak seem to be weekly responses to the Republican deconstruction of the Obama legacy, including the demise of democratic policies, and a reversal of progressive policies that shored up healthcare for all and LGBTQ+ rights. Trump's policies are an undoing of all of this and more, an undoing of our potential as humans—backing out of climate control agreements, deregulation of Wall Street, renewed militarization of police -all the progress that the United States has made in the past decade, undone in less than a year. Amidst all this undoing, the backward stepping, the regression, it seems the protests and public outcry, while massive in their responses, have little effect. Like social media itself, these protests have trended and faded as quickly as tweets, newsfeeds, and Instagram posts—these political outcries are amplified by media coverage only to be tuned out with the latest outrageous statement issued by the White House or tweeted by the current President luminescing across electronic screens. All of the "noise" created by an outraged public is masked by the latest murmurs undulating from Mar-a-Lago. In this essay, I argue that in order to disrupt a dominant narrative, using sound (noise) as a method of solidarity and empowerment, the frequency of the disruption needs to cut through the narrative and not just mask the underlying noise. The process of masking noise creates a cancellation of both the original message and the disrupting noise, which efficaciously silences the original sound (or originating voice). While this is an effective method of controlling what is heard, seen, and interpreted, it doesn't do enough to change the politic or power dynamics. I will trace a short history of how the noise of motorcycles

has been used to disrupt and change power structures within the LGBTQ+ political consciousness and I will examine how motorcycle noise has masked conservative, radical, and hate-filled speech, masked progressive anti-death penalty vigils, all while deafening protest and failing to necessarily force policy changes. And finally, in an effort to look and listen at how protest masks populist formations of noise, I argue that specific disruption can offer structural changes to political power at all levels of government when the noise created isn't tuned out.

The Visual and the Aural (I see what you say)

We live in an ocular-dominant time. W. J. T. Mitchell writes, "[i]t is a commonplace of modern cultural criticism that images have a power in our world undreamt of by the ancient idolaters." Visual memes are more powerful than the printed word, and while some may argue that between Twitter, Facebook, blog-culture, self-publishing, and other forms of social media, text-based communication dominates the airwaves, our visual sensorial experiences drive market forces via brand recognition, televisionistic priorities, and Instagram fame. Auditory and aural sensations seem to fall behind our visual-based experiences. You have to see it to believe it. But, visual iconography can be easily misread, appropriated, skewed and eventually so-exhausted in the public eye that the image no longer signifies its original referent, or as Frederic Jameson reminds us, we live in a postmodern world where signifiers are no longer attached to meaning but are free-form referents available for reattachment, reappropriation, and culturally in flux. 2 In this essay, I am not concerned with the visual signifier of the motorcycle, or the image of the motorcycle, instead I will look at the phenomenological, political, and cultural meanings of the sound of the motorcycle, the noise of pipes, rumblings of engines, and the political performance of noise as motorcycles disrupt meaning and power. As scholar Lilian Radovac argues "only by situating technologies in a larger field of power relations, social structures and capital forms does it become possible to see how power enables certain practices while disabling others, thereby shaping what technologies are and how they are used at different conjunctures." The motorcycle, thus, is more than the technology of engine, chassis, exhaust system. It is a signifying system, and is used to disrupt, empower, and radically reshape social relationships as well as political positions.

Like visual culture scholars' attention to both the visual and discourses around the visual, sound studies addresses both the "sound or aural subject" and the "object of discourses of aurality." 4 As Nicole Fleetwood theorizes that "visibility implies the state of being able to be seen, while visualization refers to the mediation of the field of vision and the production of visual objects/beings," so, too does audibility imply a state of being able to be heard, and auralization (or audition) as the mediation of the field of aurality and the production of aural objects/beings. 5 Noted sound studies scholar Jonathan Sterne reminds us that aurality and audibility (or audition) have key differences as both a sensorial experience and in terms of constructing meaning, producing the political, and referencing positionality). Key concepts differentiating aurality from visuality are offered up in Sterne's "audiovisual litany." Sterne writes, "hearing is spherical, vision is directional; hearing immerses its subject, vision offers a perspective; hearing is concerned with interiors, vision is concerned with surfaces; hearing is a primarily temporal sense, vision is a primarily spatial sense; hearing brings us unto a living world, sight moves us toward atrophy and death." I do not necessarily agree with all of Sterne's litany, as each of his pairings could be deconstructed and argued against when thinking about light/sight as a time based medium—however, it is worth considering how and why Sterne differentiates hearing vs. seeing, in a culture that tends to construct a motorcycle studies that privileges the seeing of the motorcycle over the hearing of the motorcycle.

The hearing of motorcycles seems to take precedence over the seeing of them in both the legislative and social realms, specifically considering the noise of motorcycles. The bumper sticker slogan "loud pipes saves lives" is an attempt by motorcyclists (riders) to justify an overly disruptive sound of motorcycle exhaust systems, namely the tailpipes (pipes). As a result of government legislating acceptable noise levels (in the US), riders have campaigned to shift public opinion by appealing to a sense of safety (saving lives). Distinguishing what constitutes "loud" or considering the decibels of acceptable motorcycling isn't just a legal code. What constitutes noise is both a literal and conceptual construction. Sitting at the center of this investigation of noise as protest, noise as political disruption, is the question of how the "noise" of the motorcycle performs. In audio production, noise refers to any "unwanted" sound. It can refer to sound that is generated by fluorescent lights, ambient exterior sound of traffic, construction, wind, and other weather or manmade sounds that creep into our field of listening. Determining what is unwanted is both subjective and has positionality as well as a phenomenological orientation. That is, when determining what is noise, I must consider what is my position to this sound; is the noise masking another more desired (or desirable) sound—who determines what is desired—what is the level of interruption? Acousticians have developed Noise Criteria or NC (a rating system) that identifies how "soundproof" from noise various rooms like recording studios, concert halls, theatres (stage and film), and even stadiums are. All of these types of spaces can be configured, controlled, and designed to reduce the impact of noise. Theorist Jacques Attali notes in his seminal essay on Noise that in "noise can be read the codes of life, the relations among men... when it is fashioned by man with specific tools, when it invades man's time, when it becomes sound, noise is the source of purpose and power, of the dream." Drawing from Attali's theories of noise, Jonathan Sterne points out, "[Noise] is a simulacrum of violence." And it is precisely the noise of motorcycles that can provoke anxiety and provoke solidarity, political action for both the right and left factions of political groups in the United States.

Motorcycles and Noise

Controlling the unbridled sounds of motorcycles has long been a part of the public consciousness, especially since the 1960s and 1970s, when, as racer, engineer and motorcycle restorer John Glimmerveen notes, "digital electronic decibel sound meters became universally available adding a scientific approach to quantifying exhaust noise." 2 In the UK, The Noise Abatement Society was established in 1959. In 1972, the US Environmental Protection Agency offered the Noise Control Act of 1972 in which standards of noise control for various products manufactured and sold in the US would be established. Thus, the federal government (in the US) sets and enforces uniform noise control standards for motorcycles along with aircraft, workplace conditions, railroads, and medium- and heavy-duty trucks. Other noise-generating products are regulated by state and local governments. As determined by the EPA, "[t]he standards for motorcycles only apply to those manufactured after 1982 and range from 80 to 86 dbA depending on the model year and whether the motorcycle is designed for street or off-road use." 10 For California, the standard limit is 90 decibels. So, the regulation of individual motorcycles is set by public policy and enforced by local law enforcement. Triple AAA (the American Automobile Association) a major "non-profit organization of motor clubs serving the US and Canada" lists each state and province's legal noise level threshold for motorcycles as measured in decibels. For California, recent legislation requires that "[m]otorcycles registered in the state that are manufactured on or after 2013 or have an aftermarket exhaust system manufactured on or after 2013 must have the federal EPA noise emission label affixed to it in order to be operated, used, or parked in the state." 11 Even parking (sitting at rest, sitting with the potential of movement) is subject to noise control in the Golden State.

A Short History of Dykes on Bikes® (1970s) Getting Loud

The 1970s in the US was a time when EPA standards were being established, as well as the beginning of an organized environmental movement, the second wave of feminism (Women's Rights or ERA), and an "out" LGBTQ+ movement. These various political action groups demanded to be heard in public—sounding forces through marches, parades, and other public performative actions. 12 In 1970, Christopher Street Liberation Day was established in Greenwich Village, New York. Christopher Street West (Los Angeles) also took place in 1970, as a parade/march in solidarity with what happened at the Stonewall Riots in 1969 and in support of Christopher Street Liberation Day. In addition to Los Angeles's Christopher Street West, in 1970, Gay Freedom Day was celebrated in San Francisco. 13 And for the following three years LGBTQ+ folk marched through the streets of the Castro, demanding to be heard. In 1973, a group of rebellious dykes on bikes—the original (according to San Francisco's chapter Dykes on Bikes®), unorganized, loosely configured—inserted themselves into the marching protest known as the Gay Freedom Day March in San Francisco. ¹⁴ Demanding to be heard, sonically and politically, these women interrupted and created noise via their motorcycles, sounding off unwanted murmurs of lesbian sisterhood, and lesbian politics, as a way to change the parade from featuring men or the struggle of "gay men" to the exclusion of women (the visual dominance of male contingents)—to include their sisters. It's not that women weren't present at the Gay Freedom Day. Women were tired of marching in the shadows of men, under the name of "gay," which locates queer sexuality in the realm of "men"marginalizing women, bisexuals, transgender, and later queer and questioning identifications. Women on motorcycles created noise in order to change their position in the discourse of gay rights. Dykes on Bikes® revved their engines, and inserted unwanted noise into the pedestrian polemics of gay men in San Francisco. From 1973 onward (1976 marks the official establishment of San Francisco's Dykes on Bikes® as a motorcycle contingent), women gathered in numbers reconstructing the configuration and the meaning of Pride parades. In the 1970s, only a handful of dykes rode in the parade. By the 1980s, Dykes on Bikes® (in San Francisco) had established a business license, organized as an official Parade contingent—calling themselves the Women's Motorcycle Contingent -and had been unofficially named "Dykes on Bikes" by the media (see fig. 2 & 3). Several hundred bikes would line up to start the parade. By the early 2000s, a record 450 bikes orchestrated a sonic cacophony of political power. Obviously, the advances in gay rights, LGBTQ+ visibility, and changes in public opinion on gay marriage and other LGBTQ+ legal statuses have advanced from decades of organization, political pressures, iconic allies like Mayor Gavin Newsom, and purposefully disruptive protests of groups like Queer Nation, ACT UP, and HRC's campaigns to eradicate devastating pandemics that affect us all worldwide like AIDS. But in their own way, Dykes on Bikes® has rallied queer motorcyclists all over the world in the effort to make noise and bring equal rights and equity into LGBTQ+ and straight ridership consciousness. What began as disruptive, unpredictable, and spontaneous has become regular, expected noise that saturates LGBTQ+ Prides worldwide.



Fig. 2. 2016 San Francisco PRIDE Parade Lineup. (Photograph by Erin Malone.)

Through the process of trademarking their name, San Francisco Dykes on Bikes® represents the mother chapter in an institutionalized system of chapters—Australia, UK, Iceland, Portugal, Spain, Canada, and multiple states in the US (e.g. see fig. 4). Is it still disruptive? Perhaps not, however, the noise that Dykes on Bikes® makes each year does produce an aurality, and a visuality, both of which signify resistant politics through the performance of riding at the front of the parade, and through sheer numbers, loudness, decibels. These decibels challenge the very ordinances of legal noise.



Fig. 3. 2016 San Francisco PRIDE Parade, Mindie's Bike. (Photograph by Sheila Malone.)



Fig. 4. San Francisco Pride Parade –
Dykes on Bikes®.
source: Party Of The Third Part. SF
Pride Parade 2016, Part 1: Dykes on
Bikes, Motorcyclists, Bicyclists, and a
Truck. N.p. Film.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?
v=2Uid4_jy6zo

In the case of Dykes on Bikes®, noise creates a disruption to the normative, to the grand narrative of heterosexuality, of male-dominated structures of power—whether it be the motorcycling industry, LGBTQ+ organizations, or even lesbian and feminist groups that critique masculinity, butchness, and the term dyke. And even the legal battles surrounding the trademarking of their name reveals how Dykes on Bikes disassembles what is normative and challenges legal precedents. 15 In contrast, the group known as the Thin Blue Line Motorcycle Law Enforcement Motorcycle Club (the Thin Blue Line MC) masks disruptive noise. Masking in sound is the "phenomenon where one sound obscures another, usually one weaker and higher in frequency." 16

Masking Protest

For the Thin Blue Line MC, the common denominator is supporting fellow officers, officers' families, military troops, and military families. The political position becomes irrelevant with the performance of masking. Masking opposition, free speech, and alternative perspectives in the name of institutional power, police solidarity, and military sacrifices is what counts. The state power is supported and substantiated by the presence of the Thin Blue Line MC. What resonates is the harmonics of Harleys, the throttling of exhaust, and the vibration of forces that drown out the undesirable. They drown out the condemned. This video excerpt is from a recent "performance/protest" where the Thin Blue Line MC gathered at a Texas State execution where anti-death penalty organizers also assembled in an effort to protest the state sanctioned execution of Daniel Lopez, a prisoner found guilty of killing a police officer in 2009 (e.g. see fig. 5).



The Thin Blue Line Law Enforcement Motorcycle Club defies critiques that through their presence and performance at executions that they are supporting the execution.

According to a statement made on their official Facebook page they write, "We are not there to cheer the execution of a murderer. We are there for the family. To let them know that they will never be alone. The last thing that the murderer will hear as he enters the gates of hell, is the roar of our pipes! Semper Cop!" 17 The sound becomes a deafening articulation of the solidarity of state enacted violence, an effect that burns the ears of protestors, sound that affects listeners in what sound scholar David Suisman calls a "social and political act and as a physiological, emotional experience." 18 Unlike Dykes on Bikes® the Thin Blue Line MC holds power through exclusionary practice/performance; it shuts down the possibility of other expressions. The sonic force of Harleys or other bikes fitted with customized pipes literally moves the air to envelop and distort the human voice. The group gathers in numbers in order to cover the voices of protesters. Like the Thin Blue Line MC, The organization known as the Patriot Guard Riders coalesces as a unit of massive audible machines, masking—hateful speech spewed by The Westboro Baptist

Church members who protest the funerals of US American Soldiers who have died in Iraq and Afghanistan (see fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Screenshot from kolfan93,
"Westboro Baptist Church meets
BACA and other bikers McAlester,
OK," YouTube, accessed September 1,
2017,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?
v=UoxhPL1B9qc.

The Patriot Guard Riders group covers the sounds of amplified, sensational rhetoric, spewing from bullhorns. According to the Patriot Guard Riders' official website, "The Patriot Guard Riders is a diverse amalgamation of riders from across the nation. [They] have one thing in common besides motorcycles. [They] have an unwavering respect for those who risk their very lives for America's freedom and security including Fallen Military Heroes, First Responders and honorably discharged Veterans." 19 Their purpose according to their mission is to "shield the mourning family and their friends from interruptions created by any protester or group of protesters." They clearly view their position within the law and in terms of non-violence: "We accomplish the latter through strictly legal and non-violent means." The Patriot Guard Riders, like the Thin Blue Line MC, mask the bullhorns of protestors like the Westboro Baptist Church. The Westboro Baptist Church is a religious right-wing-fundamental extremist organization. Even amplified, the Westboro clamorings become inaudible as distinct words recede to a level reserved for low-hum buzzing, or static white noise, relegated to meaningless sonic waves. The masking of the Westboro Baptist Church's sounds aligns the Patriot Guard Riders with left-wing groups who support LGBTQ+ rights through a common goal of "silencing" or neutralizing "hate speech" —hate speech that is broadcast by members of the Westboro Baptist Church. The neutralizing and obscuring of the voices of anti-death penalty protestors aligns the Thin Blue Line MC with right wing political causes that support the death penalty as a legitimate, just, and usable punishment in the United States. These two examples, in a US context are potentially representative of political extremes, and yet ideologically the Thin Blue Line Law Enforcement MC and the Patriot Guard Riders are both organizations that support the power and presence of the nationstate, the government, police action, and military forces.

Conclusion—Make Noise

The noise of bikes, the rumble of pipes, the thunder of machines, the howling of hogs, the low frequency of combustion, and the vibration of air arrest the ears of listeners—listeners at protests, at parades, at processions. Where you hear the sonic explosion perhaps dictates how you hear the intention of the rider, the message of the motorcyclist, the mission of the organization, the call of the collective—through the firing of pistons, the unifying of running motors. Political positions, political messages, and even policies are turned over through the tuning of air/exhaust systems. Dykes on Bikes®, the Thin Blue Line MC, and the Patriot Guard Riders might find that through the masking of dominant,

deviant, and alternative messages, feedback from the very system of power producing resistance creates deafening silences. Asking the listener to listen more deeply, to consider the frequencies that might be inaudible and to consider the possibility that masking doesn't always drown out the other side, but sometimes distorts and destroys the potential of harmonic possibilities, by sonically surrounding silence. ²⁰ Creating noise means we indicate our position, our politics. As we recognize noise as noise, we need to listen, not normalize the sound. We need to make noise, not mask noise. We need to disrupt. Noise creates space; noise reverberates; noise is unexpected; noise interjects; noise makes us feel (something); noise makes us think. Noise can be disruptive, and productive. And if we normalize noise, we run the risk of not being heard.

A recurring mantra of "not normalizing" the behavior of Donald Trump, or not normalizing the policies and statements issued by the current White House and Republican party seems to be a constant craving of the progressive left. By normalizing, we accept the tweets as presidential, we accept name-calling as diplomacy, and we accept celebrity culture as intellectual substance. In the field of sound engineering, the process of normalizing sound depletes the sound wave of its dynamic range, usually fitting the engineered sound into a predetermined range setting the peaks and valleys of volume to fit more neatly into a desired range. Normalizing the current political spectrum in a way negates or masks the massive protests that have occurred in 2017. And certainly, one of the largest protests heard and seen was the Women's March which took place on January 21st, 2017—resounding around the world, blanketing whole crowds in a sea of pink. The pink "pussy" hat has left a visual impact on the world, but has it actually disrupted the system? Is there too much visual noise? Could a sonic strategy move its progressive platforms forward more quickly? In this age of Trump we need to amplify, project, and disrupt. As Radovac points out, "this combination of volume and happenstance is what makes amplified street speech an interventionist political form, and its location in public space is what gives it its potentially radical inflection. It is also what makes one person's free speech another person's noise." 21 We need to make noise in order to be heard. Noise to intervene, noise to participate politically in a world that is already so noisy. And in the wise words of Dr. Seuss,

They blew on bazookas and blasted great toots on clarinets, oom- pahs and boom-pahs and flutes! Great gusts of loud racket rang high through the air. They rattled and shook the whole sky! And the mayor called up through the howling mad hullabaloo: "Hey, Horton! How's this? Is our sound coming through?²²

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♣ Bio



Sheila Malone

Sheila Malone researches the intersections of gender, technology, performance and motorcycles. Dr. Malone oversees the Technical Theatre Program at Chaffey College where she is an Associate Professor of Theatre Arts. She received a PhD in Performance Studies and Theatre History from

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Kimberly Chantal Welch, "Sideways Fences: Resisting Gentrification in Boyle Heights, a Los Angeles Community," *Lateral 6.2* (2017).

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Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

Sideways Fences: Resisting Gentrification in Boyle Heights, a Los Angeles Community

Kimberly Chantal Welch

From the introduction of hipster IPA beer to fences that go sideways (instead of up and down), Oscar Arguello's *Sideways Fences* (2017) explores the gentrification of Boyle Heights, a predominately Latino/a community near downtown Los Angeles. Sol, the main character, is pregnant and lives with her boyfriend Estéban, who drinks too much and spends his discretionary time fixing up a '52 Chevy. Early in the play, Eva, Sol's sister, crashes with the couple. The play centers around the trio's stressed relationship and Sol and Estéban's upcoming eviction, which is related to the creation of new condos. While at first glance the play appears to embrace common stereotypes including the wayward Latina (Eva) and the alcohol prone Latino, a closer analysis illuminates Arguello's artistic layering of stereotypes to make legible the conditions/structures that produce the situations in which the trio find themselves.



(L TO R): EDDIE DIAZ, RACHEL GONZÁLEZ IN SIDEWAYS FENCES AT CASA 0101 THEATER AUGUST 18 - SEPTEMBER 10, 2017. PHOTO BY JORGE VILLANUEVA

(L to R): Eddie Diaz, Rachel González in *Sideways Fences* at Casa 0101 Theater, August 18–September 10, 2017. (Photo by Jorge Villanueva.)

Arguello's depiction of Boyle Heights natives living through addiction interrogates inequitable access to mental health resources. Both Eva and Estéban self-medicate to deal with trauma; Eva inhales an undisclosed drug and Estéban drinks. When Sol confronts Eva about her drug use, Eva finally relays the events that led to her crashing with the couple: Eva's wealthy boyfriend's family sent said boyfriend to rehab and kicked Eva out of their home. Following this narration, Sol suggests that Eva move to Riverside to

live with their mother who can help her fight her addiction. The juxtaposition of Eva's potential solutions with her boyfriend's illustrates the mitigating role class plays in dealing with mental health issues. In addition, when viewed in conversation with the sources of Estéban's drinking, the juxtaposition marks the diversity of issues tied to dispossession that people in low-income communities face.

Near the top of Act 2, Estéban proclaims, "My whole life is begging." In this remark, Estéban points to the enforced precarity of a large portion of Boyle Heights residents, a trend prevalent in low-income communities across Los Angeles. Despite the fact that Estéban has strong trade skills (evidenced through his success with the '52 Chevy), he does not earn enough money to support his family. Consequently, Sol continues to work at the ninety-nine-cent store while twenty-eight weeks pregnant. The couple has limited opportunities for economic advancement. Job opportunities are frequently tied to education. Unfortunately, resources to support higher learning historically have been less accessible for people of color, particularly ones from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. This proves especially true today with Trump's (classed and racialized) attack on higher education through the cutting of funding as well as the elimination of the Deferred Action for Child Arrivals initiative. While the Trump administration has escalated the problem, the conditions in which Sol and Estéban find themselves precede Trump. This cyclical structure of enforced precarity, in combination with the strategic elimination of affordable housing in Boyle Heights for gentrification projects, further precaritizes an already at-risk community.



(L TO R): JEANETTE GODOY, RAY RIOS AND EDDIE DIAZ IN SIDEWAYS FENCES AT CASA 0101 THEATER AUGUST 18 - SEPTEMBER 10, 2017. PHOTO BY JORGE VILLANUEVA

(L to R): Jeanette Godoy, Ray Rios, and Eddie Diaz in *Sideways Fences* at Casa 0101 Theater, August 18–September 10, 2017. (Photo by Jorge Villanueva.)

Estéban and Eva can legally be evicted from their home because technically, it is an illegal dwelling. However, the only reason the legality is put into question is because, as the *New York Times* claims (according to Estéban), "Boyle Heights is the hippest new neighborhood in America;" in other words, the affluent want to live in Boyle Heights. As newcomers move in, the housing market prices dramatically increase, pushing predominately Latino/a Boyle Heights residents out of their neighborhood. As Estéban aptly notes, "People are leaving. No one can afford anything." In *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy*, Saskia Sassen argues that current categorizations of geographic space are inadequate to the task of illuminating expulsions, the ejection of people from specific places/spaces. She calls for "de-theorization" or looking from the ground up in order to illuminate trends of shrinking economies and growing expulsions. ¹

argue that *Sideways Fences* marks Boyle Heights as a productive site of de-theorization. Addressing gentrification in a historically Latina/o community (and arguably other places as well) requires an exploration of capitalism, state power, representation, and social relations, just to name a few of the power matrices contributing to the proliferation of displaced, primarily Latina/o bodies.² While recent actions by Trump-friendly neoconservatives spectacularly point to the racism prevalent in the United States, *Sideways Fences*, by pointing to the decades-long everyday battles Boyle Heights residents fight against gentrification, against the school-to-prison pipeline, and for survival, underlines that the moves made by the Trump administration and the recent highly-mediatized domestic acts of terror against minorities are, in fact, not shocking. The spectacular forms of violence mobilized in the Trump era are a continuation and national intensification of the racializing practices that support the spatial dispossession of Boyle Heights residents.

Mirroring the setting of the play, the production took place in the Boyle Heights community. By producing the play at CASA 0101 Theater and discounting tickets for Boyle Heights residents, producers Edward Padilla and Emmanuel Deleage strongly mark *Sideways Fences* as a play for the community. When Sol tells Estéban that "Life ain't begging; it's fighting—fighting for what you want," she is not just speaking to the couple's current situation. Characterized as the level-headed, strong madre figure, Sol does whatever is necessary to protect her baby. The play aligns Sol's fierce commitment to her baby to her fighting the eviction and staying in her community. When Sol advocates for resistance, she calls on Boyle Heights residents (who notably, made up the majority of the audience the night I attended) to join the fight, in part by refusing to be dispossessed from their homes. This call for direct action situates *Sideways Fences* in a genealogy of US-based sociopolitical Latino theater, as well as in a growing body of contemporary work by Los Angeles artists and troupes who use theater to incite direct action in their respective neighborhoods.

As I sat watching *Sideways Fences*, I couldn't help but be reminded of another place-based play about the gentrification of a neighborhood just down the street from the CASA 0101 production: the Los Angeles Poverty Department's *What Fuels Development* (2016). As I have argued elsewhere, *What Fuels Development* chronicles processes of criminalization involved in preparing spaces for gentrification. It is a devised piece that uses a court hearing transcript to narrate Skid Row residents' successful embargo on the addition of an alcohol-serving restaurant on the lower floor of the New Genesis, a mixed-use building that provides residences for the formerly homeless. Like *Sideways*, *What Fuels Development* draws on the skills of local artists to interrogate the increasing spatial dispossession of black and brown bodies in Los Angeles.

The two communities in question, Skid Row and Boyle Heights/East LA, are directly connected by Los Angeles's 6th street bridge. As evidenced by these two productions, both communities are using art, theater in this specific instance, to fight against gentrification and other forms of dispossession. While the use of theater to incite social change is far from a new phenomenon, I wonder what kinds of new possibilities a collaboration between Skid Row and Boyle Heights artists dedicated to pushing back against gentrification might open up. In *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, Moten and Harney theorize the "undercommons," fugitive communities functioning through a system of indebtedness that covets collectivity. For the scholars, "blackness is fantasy in the [ship] hold," not only the fantasy of escape, but that hapticality, the indebtness that thrives in the hold. If we understand blackness as tied to subject position rather than phenotype, then putting *Sideways Fences* in conversation with *What Fuels Development* prompts a consideration of what kinds of potentialities exist in the

respective communities' acknowledgment of a shared presence in the hold, a racist, classist, heteropatriarchal socioeconomic system markedly against their survival. What might the pooling of resources do? What might that resistance look like? What would it mean for these neighboring communities to come together and fight against "fences that go sideways instead of up and down?"

Notes

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≜ Bio



Kimberly Chantal Welch

Kimberly Chantal Welch is a black feminist scholar and doctoral candidate at the University of California, Los Angeles in the PhD Program in Theater and Performance Studies. Broadly speaking, her research explores the intersections of performance, homelessness, and incarceration. With an emphasis on spatial structures and their relationship to constructions of race, gender, and sexuality, Welch's work addresses historic and contemporary forms of spatial dispossession in California and Louisiana.





Ellen Gerdes, "Persistence in Pedagogy: Teaching Failure, Empathy, and Citation," Lateral 6.2 (2017).

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Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

Persistence in Pedagogy: Teaching Failure, Empathy, and Citation

Ellen Gerdes

Since the 2016 presidential election of Donald Trump, several universities made headlines for violence incited by "alt-right," neo-nazi, and white supremacist groups. Most recently, the University of Virginia saw the tragic death of a counter-protester at a terrifying white supremacist rally. And when anti-Trump and anti-fascist student groups protested the visit of "alt-right" celebrity Milo Yiannopoulous to UC Berkeley, Trump (on twitter) attacked UC Berkeley for not permitting free speech. While many "alt-right" supporters condemn so-called "political correctness" and take action under the guise of protecting "free speech," they ultimately argue for white patriarchal interests. Current pedagogical trends, such as attempting to make teaching more inclusive for minoritarian students and providing trigger warnings for victims of sexual assault, have been dismissed as coddling university students, especially students of color, transgender students, and women. As an example, in the Spring of 2016, prior to the presidential election, at UCLA, where I am a PhD Candidate and Teaching Fellow, Yiannopoulous was invited by the UCLA Bruins Republican Club for an event entitled "Feminism is Cancer" to "provide a critique of thirdwave feminism as it relates to topics including, but not limited to, free speech, the 'gender wage gap,' 'rape culture,' social justice, cultural authoritarianism, and the emerging phenomenon of safe space, microaggression, and trigger warning culture on college campuses."1

As the "alt-right" aligns itself against certain university policies and pedagogical practices intended to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, teaching the current generation of college students can feel urgent. Leading up to and since the 2016 election, my colleagues and I have had many conversations about how to hold effective discussion on current events and how to protect students and colleagues who might be targets of violence, harassment, and even deportation. As a response to Trump's election and the surging of both hate crimes and hate groups since, academics and K-12 educators have frequently stressed the importance of educating about these events via the format of the on-line syllabus and curricula. For example, as Trump blamed "both sides" in Charlottesville, the UVa Graduate Student Coalition for Liberation had already prepared an in-progress Charlottesville syllabus—a collection of resources on the history of white supremacist groups, gentrification, eugenics, slavery, Jim Crow, and Confederate statues in Charlottesville. In short, an activist resistance often engages with creative education practices and reform.

At the same time, however, institutions of higher education can also be sites of limited change due to deep-seated inequities that exist in selection of students, hiring practices, tenuring biases, and pedagogies that privilege white, masculine, European and North American epistemologies. It is well-known that the US academy suffers from the same

deep systemic biases as the country at large. As an example, recent studies demonstrate that women score worse on university teaching evaluations ⁴ and that white men still get tenured at the highest rates. Moreover, neoliberalism's hold on the American university furthers the commodification of higher education, which privileges upper/middle class students who can afford skyrocketing tuition and disadvantages adjunct instructors (disproportionately women and people of color) who face job precarity, low wages, and no guarantee of benefits. According to Henry Giroux, the neoliberal value of the market place over education for the social good has resulted in decreased support for programs of study that are not business oriented, reduced support for research that does not increase profits, replacement of shared forms of governance with business management models, ongoing exploitation of faculty labor, and use of student purchasing power as the vital measure of a student's identity, worth, and access to higher education.

In order to improve their teaching, faculty members might not have the necessary financial support in their institutions, where teaching practices and development are not necessarily prioritized. There is a lack of teacher training for college professors, and institutions commonly push for high-profile research. Eric Gould argues that, in fact, the corporatization of higher education, and along with it the conservative anti-intellectual stance and the devaluation of the humanities, can be traced back a century, well before our present political moment. He even asserts that the move to co-educational and more racially diverse student bodies in the 1970s was motivated by the financial necessity of keeping enrollment up.

No matter the offices of diversity, inclusion, and equity created by universities, we also need to prioritize teaching itself as a political act—one that requires the persistence and embodiment of social protest. The idea that teaching is political is not new, but universities have come under attack for a liberal bias among faculty and students. As Daniel Saunders points out, besides neoliberalism's effect on the economics of the university, the neoliberal attitude affects students by implying that teaching can be apolitical and that learning does not involve critical reflection or action. 8 Michael Apple argues that denying the inherent politics of teaching curricula is hegemonic. ⁹ The concept of "student-centered learning," although sometimes used as a buzzword, inherently asks educators to reflect on the power dynamics in their classes. 10 Well-known critical pedagogues like Paulo Freire, John Dewey, bell hooks, and Henry Giroux assert that the experience of our students matters to their learning; that they are not just empty receptacles for the delivery of knowledge; that education can be a process of liberation rather than control. ¹¹ For those of us who teach critical theory and cultural studies, we would be remiss to examine only our course content and not our teaching methodologies. I have taught as an adjunct instructor and graduate student in dance departments, where I value experiential learning that corresponds to the content: embodied knowledges, histories, dialogues, and socio-politics.

To me, student-centered learning means giving up some of my power as teacher; checking for student understanding and learning via assessment; and including the knowledge and experiences my students bring to the table. This includes their bodily experiences. Feminist educator bell hooks calls for true connections with our students that welcome bodies, emotions, even love, and spirituality into the classroom. All of my students expect me to teach with compassion for their lives as young adults and their development as thinkers, and I hope to teach with vulnerability as well. At the end of any college class I have taught, I am reminded that teaching is a process of profound trust between my students and me. They trust me to guide them to ideas and experiences in dancing, in writing, and in teaching that can disrupt their prior beliefs or assumptions. They trust me to take care with their personal experiences, thoughts, and opinions as we collaborate in

class discussions. They trust me to be attentive with the work I assign them and evaluate them fairly. They trust me to be mindful of their physical safety and histories. The teaching statement as a document for self-advocacy in job searches or promotion can neglect the complicated politics, messy improvisation, and frequent failures of teaching at the college level. James M. Long advances four important steps to writing a "memorable teaching philosophy" for getting hired at a university: (1) "Begin with the End" and ask "In what ways is a student different" after taking your class? (2) "Make Distinctions" about how you teach a variety of courses, (3) "Be specific" about your teaching methods and tell stories as examples, and (4) "Cite your sources," whether former teachers of yours or scholarship. ¹³ In what follows, I expand upon my teaching philosophy and share pedagogical resources, strategies, and failures.

Teaching Failure

As a white cisgender female, I strive to recognize my privilege and bias. I attempt to hold myself accountable for the politics of my teaching by using self-reflection, peer feedback, and student feedback (and not just the university evaluations) as advocated for by scholar and poet Jamila Lyiscott. 14 When teaching about Chinese cultural production, which is related to my doctoral research, I often ask my students to question my role as an authority. When they argue that I have committed significant time, travel, and effort to the study, which makes me an acceptable expert, I press them further to consider what privilege I might have as a white American scholar speaking on Chinese dance and publishing in English. And I do fail to see my privilege and bias. Recently, in a pedagogy course, I asked graduate students to consider strategies for anti-oppressive teaching based on first identifying their experiences of learning in oppressive classrooms. One student revealed that the term "anti-oppressive" was not working for her because she felt oppression was her day-to-day experience as an African American woman and felt particularly isolated in academia. In preparation for this lesson, I had thought of times I felt a loss of agency as a student (even as a graduate student), but I could not relate to her experiences of day-to-day oppression or isolation in academia as many of my professors and colleagues have shared my gender, class, and racial background.

Scholarship written by Lisa Delpit, Gloria Ladson-Billings, and Nyama McCarthy-Brown reminds us that to be student-centered is to have concern for cultural relevancy, not tokenism; 15 to include students' knowledge and perspective in the classroom means to center their cultural knowledge—language, arts, even concerns for justice in their communities—within the curriculum. Teaching from a student-centered philosophy does not mean approaching a class with a savior complex but rather learning about students' realities, what scholar Christopher Emdin calls *reality pedagogy*. His concept of *reality pedagogy* aims to highlight how students and teachers can co-teach and create a cogenerative dialogue, drawing inspiration from the model of a hip hop cipher. 16 Teaching with students' goals, experiences, and cultural influences in mind involves constant reflection by the instructor—reflection not always encouraged in the academy. When it is clear that my students don't see the value of the assigned work, that I've made assumptions about their lives, or that I haven't managed to guide a conversation across lines of difference, I fail. And try again.

I return again and again to the motivation that I am responsible for fostering what Ken Bains refers to as *deep learning*, versus strategic learning. ¹⁷ If my students cannot engage with the course material past wanting to earn an A, I have not tried hard enough to learn about how to meet them where they are—to notice what excites and inspires them, as well as what challenges them to move beyond previous boundaries they have set for themselves and their thinking (and dancing). Regardless of my goals, I must also trust my students' willingness to connect deeply to material when I am thoughtful about its

relevance to their lives. I find that when I begin doubting the time my students put into their outside work or am suspicious of their attention in class, I've lost the trust that I owe them. At times when I notice my frustrations or my students' lack of engagement, teaching is an exciting process of persistence. Just like when I call my representatives frequently, I sense failure repeatedly, and can respond with persistence.

Due to my belief in student agency and mutual learning, I often strive to teach in such a way to minimize my authority in the classroom. I borrow from Freirian inspiration to teach against authoritarian power structures. Of course, the election of Donald Trump made many Americans fear authoritarian rule, dictatorship, and fascism; there was even a theory floating around that Trump supporters shared authoritarian tendencies. 18 Putting faith in my students and striving to be anti-authoritarian in the classroom, however, isn't simple. After the 2016 election, I've thought more and more about my position and responsibility as a white woman, particularly in relation to the statistic that more white women voted for Trump than for Clinton and in regards to critiques of white womanhood and the Women's March in January 2017. My white and class privilege permit me easy access to teaching in the university classroom, and I want to leave room for my students to co-create the learning environment. I make such attempts through active learning strategies such as students speaking in partners and small groups, via assignments that ask students to teach one another, and by carefully crafting the spatial dynamics of my classrooms. I have even recently worked to incorporate breaks from sitting to lose as much as possible the physicality of student obedience. These strategies, however, cannot change the overarching white patriarchal structures that remain in US universities.

When I teach the teaching assistant preparation classes in my department, the graduate students point out that giving up power in our classrooms will not affect us each the same way; more power is already granted and expected of white cisgender heterosexual male instructors. Graduate TAs who are women of color have frequently spoken about the way undergraduate students disrespect their expertise and authority, especially surrounding grading and office hour etiquette. I have also wondered when students speak over me, complain about the amount that I smile on my teaching evaluations, or question my grading procedures, whether they would treat an older white male professor the same way. In the academic system that evaluates student work based on grades, grading sometimes becomes a place to demonstrate our power as instructors, and for minoritarian instructors, grades can confer the authority that the students won't assume.

Undergraduate students' biases around race, gender, and sexuality are supported by universities' systems of hiring and tenuring that disproportionately privilege white men. 19 Adjunct instructors, who often do not receive benefits or guarantee of continued employment, and graduate teaching assistants, who frequently work more hours than their contracts, hold so little power within the universities that, nevertheless, vitally depend upon our labor. Therefore, minimizing our authority or relaxing our power in the classroom is not always the answer. My students have taught me that it is just as valuable for students to learn to see instructors who are systemically denied power as experts. As another example, a former teacher of mine learned to use the title "Dr." to show her students that xican@ students can earn PhDs. While it seems ideal to shape a democratic classroom and undo authoritarianism in higher education, just backing away from authority isn't the whole solution. During the 2016 election, I also felt the failures of democracy—how to access information, how to protect voting rights, how to keep people engaged in voting, how to support disenfranchised groups who would not be significantly helped by any election outcome.

With teaching failures comes necessary persistence. Sometimes, this involves significantly changing assignments and re-grouping as a class. In my graduate class for TAs in the spring

after the election, an African American MFA student taught a lesson about dance and slavery. She had each of us choreograph a short solo, then asked us to perform this solo while pressed up against each other standing. We were physically cramped and our choreographic ideas stifled. Then, she asked us to lie on top of one another. By the time the fifth student laid down, we were concerned for the safety of the student at the bottom of the pile. I had to opt out because I was pregnant at the time. This lesson provoked a conversation about safety. What does it mean to approach a safe space and for whom? Was the student on the bottom of the pile any more vulnerable to harm than minoritarian students in everyday classroom experiences? A white female student suggested that the serious nature of the content might make students feel less able to opt out if they needed to; they wouldn't want to seem like they didn't care about slavery. In response, the student leading the session wondered at whether she could opt out of (historically white) contact improvisation exercises when she didn't feel like touching a partner.

We ran out of time. I knew upon leaving the class that the conversation wasn't over. I heard from several students that they felt they had left the conversation with something unsaid. Although I pride myself on thinking through feedback structures that allow the presenter agency, I worried I had failed to give the student more of a chance to lead the conversation. Even though we always felt pressed for time, I returned to the conversation the next week. We asked more questions about what "safety" could mean in the context of our classrooms, and whether safety was something attainable or even approachable. We asked more questions about "self-advocacy" and which students might feel more empowered to advocate for their position, opinion, or personal safety in class and why. We asked more questions about the importance of "risk-taking" because significant learning can happen when we are challenged, but not when we are in fear. Several students ended up in tears. We took the time to listen to one another and agreed that we might never fully achieve a safe space.

Teaching Empathy

In the above example, the graduate student led us through a process of choreography to empathize with the conditions of US slavery. In the end, we also empathized with one another's everyday safety both through the vulnerability required by her exercise and our extended conversation. Empathy, too, became a frequent topic leading up to the 2016 election: Should you block anyone with different political preferences on your social media or should you try to understand their arguments? How should you speak to loved ones who voted differently? Should you give them a chance to explain and try to see from their side? For me, I felt the limits of empathy. There were sexist and racist ideologies that I did not want to try on. Somewhat conflict averse, I wondered how to mediate varied political beliefs in the classroom. Could I really mediate a discussion of very different perspectives on immigration, for example? How could I protect my minoritarian students who might be attacked by such an open conversation? Isn't it my responsibility not to permit the "both sides are at fault" false equivalency promoted by Trump after Charlottesville? Still, I think that it is worth attempting a cultivation of empathy in the classroom and worth sensing its limits.

As a scholar of performance, I aim to guide students in a process of analyzing power dynamics involved in performance. We look together at the socio-historical contexts that surround the making, performing, and viewing of embodied works. For example, we might compare the aesthetic of women dancing in a classical ballet, such as *Swan Lake*, with the ballet from the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the *Red Detachment of Women*. We contrast the support of the male partner to the female in the classical ballet to the assertive posturing of the army battalion of women on pointe. We view promotional videos for the hugely successful Chinese dance concert *Shen Yun* to ask what American audience

expectations and Orientalist stereotypes are fulfilled by advertising this dance as "5,000 years of civilization. Live on stage." Especially non-majors, who take my courses for general education credit, might be thinking about meaning-making and issues of representation in performance for the first time. This type of thinking can, for many students, feel frustrating; performance is often, after all, quite abstract. Experiences with movement often give them access to both empathy and conceptual analysis.

To stop at the step of recognizing issues in cultural representation and critique does not accomplish conversation across lines of difference. And to only watch and discuss performance misses out on the potential for embodied learning activities to expand our thinking, let us feel vulnerable with one another, relate to one another more intimately, and approach empathy. For non-majors, this learning can take place through a dance workshop or even a workshop in everyday gestures. In particular, dance departments' strong orientation toward the body allows for us to connect to urgent conversations surrounding the surveillance and violence toward the black male body in the US. The work on the black body in Ta-Nehisi Coates Between the World and Me and Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* pair well with such an inquiry. ²¹ I've assigned students the texts and ask them to create gestures from excerpts, sometimes using the authors' words like a score for the body and other times asking the gestures to represent the mood or concept conveyed by the authors. We shared these gestures and tried them on our own bodies. We discussed what came up for each of us in taking these words into our own bodies, and what might have been lost. In the humanities, European and North American literary (and patriarchal) ways of knowing and communicating are still privileged; arts and performance classes can try on other epistemologies that value students' bodily experience in the world.

Teaching Citation

In the 2016 presidential campaign, Melania Trump's words that almost precisely copied First Lady Michelle Obama's speech reminded many Americans of the countless instances that white culture has appropriated black culture. As writers, we are taught to cite our sources and to conduct exhaustive research in order to ascertain original contributions; otherwise, we face punitive consequences. As educators, we use our syllabi as a means for citing written sources, but we don't always acknowledge the lineage of our teaching methods. In dance technique classes, it is common practice to borrow movement warmups and sequences from our teachers. I have had teachers who name the origins of the movement or the lineage, which not only gives credit where credit is due but also evidences dance lineages outside of European and North American white dance. As teachers, we bring a lot of people into the room with us—authors, guest teachers, mentors, community members. In every class I teach, I enjoy bringing in guests who can provide different teaching methods and share different life experiences than me. In addition, I reference my teachers; sometimes, this means showing video, such as of my Chinese dance teachers, so that students also see my embodiment of movement as a process of translation. Recently, I began asking my students to tell me about their significant teachers via an audio essay. This assignment gives me a lens into meaningful transitions in their lives and important aspects of their identities.

When I begin creating a syllabus for a course, I search for reading material that is both accessible (financially and content-wise) and disciplinarily diverse. I have been inspired by anthropologist Angela Jenks's recommendations to professors to avoid over-assigning work, especially keeping in mind students that work their way through college. ²² I borrow a strategy from one of my mentors, Sarah Hilsendager, assigning different groups of students different readings depending on relevance to their interest, in order to attain a breadth of readings in the class without overloading each student and provide a structure

for students to teach each other content.²³ I also look at the authors as a whole in terms of representations of gender, race, and ethnicity, and even authors who work outside the academy. When I ask students to present on their readings, I include in the assignment the task of looking up the author to share with the class. I find that students can slip into misgendering all authors as "he," or can be unaware of who teaches in their home university... or even the range of universities and communities that produce research.

My mentors were not lecturers, but in the academy, lecturing is often viewed as quintessential college teaching. Oration, of course, is also associated with a male style of expressing knowledge, which was much discussed during the 2016 presidential campaign. 24 Some lecturers are incredibly engaging, but I find myself in agreement with bell hooks who has critiqued the lecture as a spectacle or performance for passive participants: "When we as a culture begin to be serious about teaching and learning, the large lecture will no longer occupy the prominent space that has held for years." 25 Another one of my pedagogy mentors, Karen Bond, has general education students design and lead a dance experience in relation to a reading rather than present on the "main points." 1 find this a wonderfully difficult critical thinking assignment and borrow this strategy. How do we translate these ideas into bodily action? It is not a straightforward task.

The graduate students I work with also ask how to involve students in projects of social action, putting theory into practice, particularly outside of a university setting. As Henry Giroux and Susan Giroux argue, it isn't enough to teach our students to critique, but also to do our part as public intellectuals: "pedagogy's role lies not only in changing how people think about themselves, their relationship to others and the world, but also in energizing students and others to engage in those struggles that further possibilities for living in a more just and fairer society." 27 I return now to how the online syllabus itself has become a form for social justice—such as the revisionist Trump Syllabus 2.0.28 I learned from my students that engaging with the syllabus as a means for curating knowledge gives them the opportunity to reflect on how they have been taught in the academy and revise for what they envision as more equitable teaching and learning. Assigning Raquel Monroe's article, "I Don't Want to Do African . . . What about my Technique?': Transforming Dancing Places into Spaces in the Academy" has allowed both undergraduates and graduates to think critically about the politics of curricular design and to reflect upon how the academy privileges European and North American white aesthetics and epistemologies. 29 Instead of writing an essay, when students design a syllabus, they consider who we should treat as an authoritative voice, what we should watch, what to legitimate as knowledge, and what experiences we can have together that promote a communal learning process. Then, the syllabus becomes a creative act rather than the document of due dates and policies often ignored by students, much to professors' frustration. From the activist syllabus, we can learn that reflections on our teaching matter to political acts of resistance and that our teaching always occurs in conversation with others—those within and outside of our classrooms, including those who have paved the way forward.

Notes

1. For more information about this event, see the facebook event page. Feminism is Cancer featuring Milo Yiannopoulous, accessed August 31, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/events/253819344970893/.

- 2. The Southern Poverty Law Center has been keeping track of hate groups and hate crimes in the US. After the Charlottesville protest, I saw the SPLC's "hate map" of hate groups shared by many of my contacts on social media. According to SPLC's annual census report, anti-Muslim hate groups tripled from 2015 to 2017. "Hate groups increase for second consecutive year as Trump electrifies radical right," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed August 31, 2017, https://www.splcenter.org/news/2017/02/15/hate-groups-increase-second-consecutive-year-trump-electrifies-radical-right.
- 3. The Charlottesville Syllabus was created with an intention for additions to the content. The authors write, "Use this document as it's useful to you, support each other, and take to the streets." "The Charlottesville Syllabus," August 12, 2017, https://medium.com/@UVAGSC/the-charlottesville-syllabus-9e01573419d0
- 4. See a brief synopsis of a study by Stark, Boring, and Ottoboni (2014) who used advanced statistical methods to analyze student evaluations of teaching in both US and French populations. Colleen Flaherty, "Bias against female instructors," *Inside Higher Ed*, January 11,
 - 2016, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/01/11/new-analysis-offers-more-evidence-against-student-evaluations-teaching.
- 5. Colleen Flaherty, "More Diverse Faculty, not on Tenure Track," *Inside Higher Ed*, August 22, 2016, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/08/22/study-finds-gains-faculty-diversity-not-tenure-track.
- 6. Henry A. Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 22.
- 7. Eric Gould, *The University in a Corporate Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).
- 8. Daniel Saunders, "The Impact of Neoliberalism on College Students," *Journal of College and Character* 8, no. 5 (2007).
- 9. Michael W. Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004). 2
- 10. James M. Long offers job applicants advice on how to write a teaching philosophy document that will stand out in a pile of teaching philosophies that claim "student-centered" learning. James M. Long, "4 Steps to a Memorable Teaching Philosophy," *Chronicle for Higher Education*, August 29,
 - 2010, http://www.chronicle.com/article/4-Steps-to-a-Memorable/124199/.
- 11. Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Continuum, 2000); John Dewey, Experience and Education (New York: Collier Books, 1963); bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom (New York: Routledge, 1994); Henry A. Giroux, Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning (Granby, Mass: Bergin & Garvey, 1988).
- 12. hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*.
- 13. Long, "4 Steps to a Memorable Teaching Philosophy." 2
- 14. Jamila Lyiscott, "If You Think You're Giving Students of Color a Voice, Get Over Yourself," May 23, 2017, http://jamilalyiscott.com/blog/.

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- 15. Lisa D. Delpit, *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (New York: New Press, 1995); Gloria Ladson-Billings, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers Of African American Children* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2009); Nyama McCarthy-Brown, *Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World: Culturally*

- 16. Christopher Emdin, For White Folks Who Teach In The Hood—And The Rest Of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy And Urban Education (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016.)
- 17. Derek Bruff, "Fostering Deep Learning-A Report from the CFT's 25th Anniversary," Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching, September 12, 2011, https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/2011/09/fostering-deep-learning-a-report-from-the-cfts-25th-anniversary/; Ken Bains, What The Best College Teachers Do (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004).
- 18. See Matthew MacWilliams, "The One Weird Trait that Predicts Whether You're a Trump Supporter," Politico, January 17,
 2016, http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/01/donald-trump-2016-authoritarian-213533
- 19. Colleen Flaherty, Inside Higher Ed, August 22, 2016, "More Diverse Faculty, not on Tenure Track," https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/08/22/study-finds-gains-faculty-diversity-not-tenure-track.
- 20. "Shen Yun," accessed August 31, 2017, https://www.mccawhall.com/events/detail/shen-yun-1.
- 21. Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York : Spiegel & Grau, 2015); Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: an American lyric* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2014).
- 22. I think of it as my responsibility to motivate students to understand their outside work as essential to their learning and integral to our learning as a class community. I like to share this piece with my graduate teaching assistants: Angela Jenks, "Why Don't Students Read?" Teaching Tools, *Cultural Anthropology*, August 19, 2016, https://culanth.org/fieldsights/948-why-don-t-students-read.
- 23. Hilsendager is a historian of American dance education. See her co-authored book: Richard G. Kraus, Sarah Chapman Hilsendager, and Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *History of the Dance in Art and Education* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1991).
- 24. Amy Chozick, "Hillary Clinton Raises Her Voice, and a Debate Over Speech and Sexism Rages," *New York Times*, February 4, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/05/us/politics/hillary-clinton-speechessexism.html.
- 25. bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 64. **2**
- 26. Bond researches dance education from a phenomenological perspective with special attention to bringing out the experience of the students, even children. See, for example, Karen Bond, "'Boys Are Morons. Girls Are Gross': Let's Dance" in *Dance and Gender: An Evidence-Based Approach*ed, ed. Wendy Oliver and Douglas S. Risner (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2017).
- 27. Henry A. Giroux and Susan S. Giroux, *Take Back Higher Education: Race, Youth, and the Crisis of Democracy in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 97.
- 28. See, for example, "Islamophobia is Racism: Resource for Teaching and Learning about Anti-Muslim Racism in the United States," accessed August 31, 2017, https://islamophobiaisracism.wordpress.com/; N. D. B. Connolly and Keisha N. Blain, "Trump Syllabus 2.0," Public Books, June 28, 2016, http://www.publicbooks.org/trump-syllabus-2-0/. "Trump Syllabus 2.0" is a response to an earlier Trump syllabus put forth by the Chronicle of Higher Education that had

hypocritically promoted work of straight, white scholars. This course was created by two scholars of color, N.D.B. Connolly and Keisha N. Blain, who are both historians. It draws from many scholars and disciplines.

29. Raquel L. Monroe, "I Don't Want to Do African . . . What about my Technique?':

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♣ Bio



Ellen Gerdes

Ellen Gerdes is a PhD candidate in Culture and Performance at UCLA. Her dissertation focuses on intersections of politics and performance in Hong Kong. After earning her Master's degree in dance education from Temple University, she taught at Bucknell, Drexel, Rowan, and Temple Universities. Her writing has been published in *Asian Theatre Journal, Cultural Studies/Critical Methodologies, Dance Chronicle, Journal of Dance Education, Journal of Emerging Dance Scholarship,* and the anthology, *New Directions in Asian American Dance.* In 2007, the Association for Asian Performance awarded her the Emerging Scholars award. She performs in Los Angeles as a dancer and singer.





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Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

Arab American Life in the Trump Era: An Interview with Moustafa Bayoumi

Christine Marks and Moustafa Bayoumi

Moustafa Bayoumi is an award-winning writer and Professor of English at Brooklyn College, City University of New York. He is the author of *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America* (2008) and *This Muslim American Life: Dispatches from the War on Terror* (2015). His work has received multiple awards, including the American Book Award and the Arab American Book Award for Nonfiction. As a columnist for *The Guardian*, he regularly publishes critiques of Donald Trump's anti-Muslim policies and the double standards that the government and the media apply to Muslim Americans. He has also contributed to *The New York Times Magazine*, *New York Magazine*, *The National*, *CNN.com*, *The London Review of Books*, *The Nation*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Progressive*, and other publications (for links to his contributions, see his website: http://moustafabayoumi.com/writings/). A highly regarded author, Bayoumi is regularly invited to speak at national and international conferences and literary events. As we discuss below, he is also active on Twitter (https://twitter.com/BayoumiMoustafa/), where he posted the most shared tweet of the 2016 presidential debate

(https://twitter.com/BayoumiMoustafa/status/785293447141924865). We met in Astoria this summer to talk about his views on Arab American life in the Dark Age of Trump.

CHRISTINE MARKS: Donald Trump has been in office for 178 days now. You've written about his first 100 days in *The Guardian*. Do you have any amendments to your observations after the events of the past 78 days?

MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI: What I wrote in *The Guardian* was that Trump has actually done something positive: he has unified a lot of people in opposition to him. He hasn't done much else, of course. His incompetence is monumental. But now I'm concerned that the resistance against Trump may have waxed and may now begin to wane. The rise and fall of activism against Trump is likely inevitable or, perhaps more accurately, cyclical. But when the Supreme Court recently ruled that a modified version of the Muslim ban could go forward, I became deeply worried about this country. What's more concerning to me than their troubling ruling is that their decision didn't seem to galvanize people. We had a lot of unity at the 100-day mark but have much less organized opposition at the six-month mark. That reality is something to pay attention to.

CM: I appreciated the optimism you showed there as people took to the streets, but at this point one might indeed feel a bit disillusioned. So what can be done to keep the

momentum and rediscover the energy and joy you observed after the first 100 days? Judith Butler has framed precarity as a site for shared alliance and political activism across difference. Do you still anticipate new alliances emerging in the Trump era?

MB: I'm certain that there will be new alliances in the future. The best kind of political coalitions happen organically due to some similarity of oppression and a shared vision of a better future. The coming catastrophe of climate change, to take one example, should unite many different constituencies, including the labor movement, antiwar activists, immigration advocates, and maybe even green techno utopians. I could imagine new and interesting alliances happening there. But one of the things I try not to do too much of in my work is to forecast into the future. There's enough of a crisis staring us in the face that we don't have to spend our time forecasting into the future. Instead, we need to deal with what's happening in the present and do so with sober analysis. What we should also be wary of is romanticizing our actions too much. Consider the Muslim ban, again. The resistance that developed immediately in the wake of the first proposed Muslim ban depended too much on a notion that the law will save the country from Trump's overreach. But the law has also been on the side of slavery, segregation, and Japanese internment, to name a few notorious examples. The law historically protects certain vested interests and maintains the social order. At times our laws may align with principles of social justice, but we have to be cognizant of the fact that very often our laws and the courts have gone against the principles of social justice. Regarding the Muslim ban, what happened is that people saw lawyers in a very heroic light because there were some lawyers who were doing extraordinary work to challenge the ban, and judges across the country also felt emboldened by the actions of these lawyers and of the people. But then when the Supreme Court spoke, all the energy of using the law to affirm principles of equality was sucked out of the fight. What this means is that we are going to have to have a very horizontal approach to understanding how we're going to achieve true social justice in the country. We can't simply rely on our traditional institutions, and in our struggles I suspect we may even find ourselves developing some new institutions.

CM: Let's look back some more then rather than looking forward. The publication dates of your two books (almost) frame Obama's presidency: *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?* came out in 2008, *This Muslim American Life* in 2015. What impact did the Obama administration have on Muslim Americans? What continuities and ruptures in the government's treatment of / rhetoric for Muslim Americans do you find most striking in the short time since Trump has become president?

MB: I started writing How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? in the midst of the Bush administration, so I saw it very much as a project that was describing the Bush administration's impact on Arab and Muslim populations in the country. When the book came out—around the same time as the election was happening (the book came out in September and the election was in November)—I remember thinking, "Maybe the election of Obama will mean that the book is, I wouldn't say superfluous, but now about the past and not the present." Well, I was wrong, completely wrong. Part of the reason that the book continued to resonate was that Obama didn't have enough will or courage to change the orientation of the country when it came to the War on Terror. The changes that he did make were somewhat cosmetic. For example, his administration didn't like the name "Global War on Terror," and preferred to talk about "war on violent extremism" or the "war on al-Qaeda and its affiliates." But that didn't make any difference, really, as everyone still employed the term "War on Terror." Obama started off strong when he first came into the office, saying that he was going to end the practice of torture and that he was going to close Guantanamo Bay. But Guantanamo Bay, as we all know, is still open. To be fair, that was as much Congress's fault as Obama's, but still, looking at Obama's record, we find

basically a continuation in almost every aspect of the War on Terror, and in some ways an expansion of the war. We saw the escalation of drone warfare precisely because, as has been well documented, Obama did not want to bring more people to Guantanamo Bay. In terms of domestic policy, the Bush administration had a kind of blunt hammer approach to Muslim communities here. There were many sweep arrests. There was special registration, where non-citizen non-immigrant men from twenty-four Muslim-majority countries had to register with the government. With Obama, what we saw was that the approach became more targeted, but the target was still Muslim communities writ large. The FBI engaged informants and set up a lot of dubious acts of terror that they would then thwart at the last minute. They pursued the "Countering Violent Extremism" program, which stigmatized Muslim communities. What we saw with Obama was a shift in rhetoric but also essentially a deepening of the national security state. I suspect this trend will extend further with the presidency of Donald Trump.

CM: Do we see a shift in media representation and the production of knowledge? In *This Muslim American Life*, you wrote about the production of knowledge drawing on thinkers like Edward Said and Michel Foucault. Your words seem prophetic, as you observe "the birth of a pure and simple will to power, without the burden of knowledge, and where more knowledge just creates more complications." So, are "fake news" and "alternative facts" again simply a continuation of this trend, or have we entered a new stage of (lack of) knowledge production?

MB: That's a good question that I'd probably want to think more deeply about, but my initial response is that I think today's reality is less a break with and more probably a continuation of the past. People seem to have forgotten how much George W. Bush was ridiculed for not being particularly smart or literate. Perhaps Obama's mastery of language helped people forget Bush. And Obama's talents also make Trump look particularly idiotic. But Trump and Bush share a certain kind of uncurious approach to the world, one where knowledge just gets in the way and expertise? Well, expertise be damned. Only power matters. We saw that with Bush, and the essay where I examine that in This Muslim American Life is called "A Bloody Stupid War." Much of what I wrote there, composed before Trump arrived on the national political scene, would fit Trump, too. He continues Bush's notion that pure power overrides any other consideration. Bush, however, sometimes seemed embarrassed by his genuine ignorance of things. He seemed to want to channel his lack of knowledge into folksy simplicity. Trump on the other hand sees his ignorance as a virtue. God help us. But, of course, our analysis should not be about Bush and Trump as people but about how their administrations operate, and both administrations are concerned with the production of power over and above the production of knowledge. "Fake News" is Trump's way of usurping the production of knowledge for his projection of power.

CM: Can we talk a bit more about your personal background as it in some ways reflects the precarity of Muslim American lives? You received your green card right after 9/11 and you've stated that to some degree that made you feel safer because it was better than a work visa, but of course you were still quite vulnerable in spite of that status. Now you've had your American citizenship for about six years. Amit Majmudar writes in "The Beard," a poem recently published in *The New Yorker*, "I am alone here now, / among Americans a foreigner / when just last year I used to be / among Americans American." How do you feel? A foreigner? American? Both?

MB: That's a tough question because I think that I try to reject any strong identification with anywhere, but I understand that that is a privileged position. My parents are from Egypt. I was born in Switzerland. I've spent significant amounts of time in my life in Europe. I was raised in Canada, and I've lived now for quite a while in the United States.

I'm not part of the jet-setting elite by any stretch. My roots in Egypt are quite humble. Nevertheless, I was afforded a certain amount of migration possibilities, cosmopolitanism —whatever you want to call it—which affords me a certain luxury. What this means is that whenever somebody wants to identify me as something, I sometimes try to deflect that desire onto another identity of my choosing. It's my little way of trying to stop people from prejudging me.

CM: Yes, there's a freedom in having multiple belongings, evading being labeled. Which brings us to identity politics . . . In a PEN interview you claim that "Identity has become a predictive science that defeats the spontaneity of human existence," and in your recent introduction to *Mizna*, a journal on Arab American art and literature, you also reject the idea that being Arab American is primarily about identity or politics. Instead, you suggest, "it's about physics. Arab Americans are endless combinations of matter and energy. We are the profound study of movement through space and time. We are the result of the sometimes-forced propulsion of particles and objects—also known as people—from one land to another." Could you elaborate on the limitations of identity politics and your alternative view on being Arab American in the Age of Trump?

MB: The way that we talk about "identity politics" is troubling in the United States. The term tends to be thrown around as an accusation by conservatives (and some liberals), and it's used as a way of shutting out people who have been historically marginalized and who are pushing back on the systems that have marginalized them. When "identity politics" is invoked by its detractors, it's usually talked about as a post-civil rights and very recent phenomenon that is hastening the demise of the nation and its putative unity. That's nonsense, of course. Identity politics began at least when European colonialism circumnavigated the globe. European colonialism labeled people into very strict and unchangeable identities as a way of colonizing them. Identity politics, in other words, has been with us for hundreds of years. It's just that when it's not in service of empire, or the nation state, or the dominant group, then it becomes an insult instead of the mode by which power is wielded. What's at the heart of identity politics, in other words, is not identity but power. If we stop at identity and don't consider power (which is often how liberal multiculturalism operates), then we fall into a trap where identity becomes a straightjacket. You represent one thing and one thing only. But no one has one identity only. That's what I was trying to get at in the Mizna introduction, that Arab Americans (and all people) are complex and multifaceted. Identity politics can either be a straightjacket, locking people into a fixed identity, or identity politics can be a way to understand how identity and power operate with the aim of a producing a more equitable world. The age of Trump will favor the former. It's up to us to push the latter.

CM: Reflecting on the response to your *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?*, you picture yourself as a fish in fishbowl—inescapably subjected to the public's distorted perception of you. We know from thinkers like W. E. B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon how detrimental such distortion can be to one's sense of self. Du Bois saw the history of African Americans as a history of strife towards a merging of the double consciousness—"always looking at one's self through the eyes of others"—into a unified self. Would you say that that is the primary struggle of Arab Americans as well?

MB: Arab Americans and really all marginalized people share this reality of double consciousness, where we see ourselves in one way but also know that we are seen by the dominant culture in another way. But double consciousness leads less to a search for a unified self and more to an understanding that in this dialectic, between who you are and how you are seen, lies prejudice.

CM: To come back to the fishbowl metaphor one more time: As a public intellectual, your fishbowl is kind of a major attraction in an aquarium full of visitors. Since you can't actually hide behind a coral, where do you find refuge?

MB: It's very important to have a community of people who can understand you and your struggles wordlessly. You don't have to explain things. They just know exactly what it is. That's very comforting. A zone of non-judgment. That's probably true for anybody, but that's certainly true for life in the public intellectual realm. You also quickly develop a thick skin. Hate mail, things like that, who cares? Especially in the internet age, it's so easy to send insults, but I ignore them. (I know I'm lucky here. The hate that's directed toward women in the public sphere is much worse.) I also seek some refuge in aesthetics. I still look for things that are even traditionally beautiful. They make me happy, and that makes life more liveable. For example, I've recently started to learn how to play Flamenco guitar, and while the sounds that I make are certainly not beautiful, listening to more and more of that kind of music, which I find tremendously moving, is. As is the cinema of Michael Haneke, for example. I find his films amazing. In all kinds of ways, the arts can be a regenerative place. We should never forget that.

CM: It's interesting that the three examples you mention are all beyond language: wordless understanding, music, and images.

MB: You're right. What does that say?

CM: Language is troubling . . . Yet the work that you do requires you to speak multiple languages in a sense: academic, journalistic, twitter speak. You go through different avenues to reach people. Who are you writing to? Who do you consider to be your main audience?

MB: What has always interested me from the very beginning of writing, even back in high school, is, how do you write in different modes, in different registers? I was very fortunate that I had very good English teachers in high school. We didn't just read plays and novels, but we also read essays and explored the art of the essay. We looked at literature with complexity and not just with exams in mind. And as an undergraduate, I wrote for the student newspaper. I mostly wrote film reviews because I got to see the movies for free. But I also did some reporting, and I remember trying to find a different voice for each type of piece. I was also the poetry editor of our undergraduate literary journal. I've had some fiction published. I've written journalism, scholarship, and tweets. Twitter is a good example because when I first tried my hand at it, I was trying to figure out what it is. I thought that Twitter, with its 140-character limit, was a natural place for aphorisms and poetry. And I still see some people on Twitter who think that. But that's not what Twitter is about. I realized quickly that Twitter is this ongoing conversation. A tweet is more like an interjection than a maxim. Once I understood that Twitter is a conversation, the nature of my tweets changed as well. To write well is about understanding the genre of what you're writing in and then finding the right voice for that genre. That's one of the things I look for when I write.

CM: To come back to the beginning: 178 days down, many more to come. . . . Has this election shifted your focus as a writer?

MB: Political engagement is more of an imperative today than it was last year. Once Trump was elected, I postponed a couple of writing projects I had in mind because there now is this grand imperative that's staring us right in the face, especially for Muslim Americans. The security of Muslim Americans is currently in jeopardy. It would be irresponsible for me not to address that. But there is some hope, too. I've been working on these issues at least since 2001, but now there's much more acknowledgment that

Muslim Americans routinely face bigotry and state repression. In other words, people across the country are waking up to the reality that Muslim Americans have been living through since 2001. We need to build on this understanding in order to forestall any kind of tragedy that could come.

CM: Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts with *Lateral*, and good luck and energy for the next 1275 days!

å Bio



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≜ Bio



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Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

"Truth" in the Age of Trump

Sara Mitcho

Cultural studies scholars have a long history of problematizing the concept of truth by critiquing positivism and objectivity, and outlining the dangers of an uncritical reliance on Enlightenment-inspired rationality. Some might argue, in fact, that at the very core of cultural studies' critique of the status quo is the idea that the knowledge we produce is influenced by our subject position and embedded in culture and the material historical conjuncture in which we live and work. The concept of a singular objective Truth is all but impossible to sustain under such circumstances. However, as today's historical conjuncture includes Donald Trump's presidency, many on the left have turned to the tactic of calling out Trump's lies, enumerating them, fact-checking them, and countering them with contrary evidence in an effort to resist Trump's agenda and policies. Such tactics seem more than logical in the face of the president's steady stream of lies and "alternative facts" designed to justify his agenda. While well-intentioned, however, dependence on calls for fact-checking and slogans that proclaim allegiance to science without so much as a nod to the cultural and social factors that color the fraught process of knowledge production risks reifying some of the very problems that even the earliest of cultural studies scholars have highlighted. This essay begins to grapple with the question of what we are to do with this tension, the tension between the critical work of critiquing positivism and objectivity and the desire to call out Trump and his seeming barrage of bald-faced lies and efforts to gaslight the public. The essay represents a call, ultimately, for cultural studies scholars, activists, teachers, and critical theorists to resist the urge to set down the tools of critical theory but instead to apply them with abandon to Trump, his policies, and, perhaps most importantly, to ourselves.

Despite a long history of debates about precisely what cultural studies is and what it should and will be in the future, few would deny that among the concepts central to the field is power. In making visible various intersecting systems of power, including ideology, the political economy, and norms related to gender, sexuality, and race, we begin to complicate the notion that one can objectively observe an object and apply reason and the scientific method to discern the Truth about that object. Embedded in a particular moment in history and influenced by our positionality, culture, and social context, the knowledge we produce is informed by what we think we already know about the world. While such notions are the bread and butter of a critical theorist or cultural studies scholar, this is not the case for skeptical colleagues and friends and, importantly, students who might grapple with what seems to be an affront to the methodologies they are learning in other courses.

Students wrestling with the critique of positivism and objectivity might conclude that such critiques amount to the idea that "everything is subjective" or that "it just depends on your opinion." In such cases, distinguishing between the relativism and imaginary thinking

that critical theorists are sometimes accused of and a real need to account for how the cultural, social, and historical context and one's social identity and positionality influence how that person thinks about a particular object or phenomenon is essential. Ironically, the concept of hegemony simultaneously makes this task easier to explain by labeling the process by which a particular dominant view of the world becomes common sense, and more difficult as its very presence makes it hard for students to see their way around it.

Indeed, students are not the only ones who may be confused or critical about cultural studies practitioners' critique of positivism and objectivity. The Sokal Affair of 1996 is a possible case in point. This is, of course, the famous case where physicist Alan Sokal submitted and successfully published a fake article in the journal *Social Text*, in which he made dubious arguments that wove together scientific language and rhetoric about social constructionism to demonstrate what he saw as a problematic trend among postmodernists and cultural studies scholars of accepting any argument that seemed to justify their political position regardless of its rigor. Sokal saw the publication of his article as proof that these scholars on the left were willing to accept arguments that were divorced from truth and empirical facts. In explaining his decision to submit the hoax article and allow for its publication more than twenty years ago, Sokal lamented the fact that the Left (with which he himself identified) had seemingly severed its ties with science:

For most of the past two centuries, the Left has been identified with science and against obscurantism; we have believed that rational thought and the fearless analysis of objective reality (both natural and social) are incisive tools for combating the mystifications promoted by the powerful—not to mention being desirable human ends in their own right. The recent turn of many "progressive" or "leftist" academic humanists and social scientists toward one or another form of epistemic relativism betrays this worthy heritage and undermines the already fragile prospects for progressive social critique. Theorizing about "the social construction of reality" won't help us find an effective treatment for AIDS or devise strategies for preventing global warming. Nor can we combat false ideas in history, sociology, economics and politics if we reject the notions of truth and falsity.¹

In today's context of a seemingly endless flow of misinformation from Donald Trump and his administration in which the fight against global warming, medical advances like vaccinations long accepted as effective, knowledge about women's reproductive health, and other scientific developments seem at risk, Sokal's critique might begin to look appealing to both us and our students. In the face of the daily storm of lies and active efforts to obscure or reduce access to scientific data, in the face of policy proposals seemingly divorced from reality that pose threats to marginalized populations throughout the country, a critical approach can feel like a luxury.

And indeed, some on the left—a group that may include some of our students and ourselves—have begun adopting slogans that perhaps unwittingly reflect a positivist view of science. Slogans on signs and t-shirts proclaim that "science is not a liberal conspiracy" and "science is real." Such pronouncements echo Hillary Clinton's declaration during her acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention: "I believe in science." Organizers estimated that, in April of 2017, more than a million people participated in the March for Science in Washington, DC and in sister marches around the world to profess their support for "the need to respect and encourage research that gives us insight into the world." March organizers explained on their website that

People who value science have remained silent for far too long in the face of policies that ignore scientific evidence and endanger both human life and the

future of our world. New policies threaten to further restrict scientists' ability to research and communicate their findings. We face a possible future where people not only ignore scientific evidence, but seek to eliminate it entirely. Staying silent is a luxury that we can no longer afford. We must stand together and support science.³

Our gravitation toward such ideas, as well as pithy slogans and clever protest t-shirts, and exasperated declarations that Trump is completely divorced from reality are fueled, in part, by our disbelief at the extent to which Trump and his associates appear to ignore scientific maxims that have long ago been accepted as fact. We find ourselves emboldened to declare that, in this complex world, surely we can at least agree that vaccinations are helpful, that climate change is real, that *science itself* is *real* and its data *materially compelling*.

But we would do well to check this impulse against the equally real benefits of a critical skepticism of positivism and the notion of objectivity. We would do well to slow down and avoid statements that suggest that science is somehow a vessel filled with pure objective knowledge ready to be discovered and that scientific practice is simply the extraction of this knowledge from the vessel. Such an idea flies in the face of the work of any number of critical theorists, postmodernists, feminist theorists, and other cultural studies scholars. Similarly, overemphasis on simply listing facts or listing Trump's lies does not guard against a situation where Trump or one of his colleagues cites nothing but verifiable facts to support a harmful policy. While naming Trump's lies is important, so is tracing the relationships of power at play and the harmful consequences of his actions. This is the kind of nuanced analysis cultural studies facilitates.

Have we so quickly forgotten the insights of theorists like Anne Fausto-Sterling, for one, who has so adeptly described social and cultural influences on the knowledge scientists produce about gender and sexuality, or Donna Haraway, who has spent a career describing the fraught relationship between science and the social world? These are simply two examples from among feminist theorists; there are no doubt many more who have teased out and particularized the ways in which social, cultural, and historical factors—and, importantly, relationships of power—have influenced the kind of knowledge science produces. Have we forgotten scientific theories about male and female brains, about how homosexuality might be cured? We must also, of course, consider those situations where uneven relationships of power have led to justifications of treating marginalized individuals as specimens from which we might draw evidence in the name of advancing science. The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment and the case of Henrietta Lacks are but two well-known examples of this phenomenon.

These are precisely the kinds of examples that might be cited in helping students understand the dangers of ignoring the influence of hegemony and positionality on knowledge production. While exploiting marginalized populations in the name of advancing scientific research (as in the case of the Tuskegee experiment and Henrietta Lacks) is not the same as producing supposedly objective theories that reflect societal beliefs, both illustrate the relationship between power and knowledge production. When scientists and other thinkers are situated in a particular position of power and are influenced by what they think they already know when employing so-called objective scientific methods, they risk producing—and have produced—theories about the world that are more reflective of their positionality and hegemonic cultural beliefs than of actual phenomena. A deep belief in positivist science and objectivity has lent these theories credibility. It is crucial, therefore, that we teach our students to both understand the value of natural science—in helping describe the effects and progression of climate change, refuting claims about the ill effects of vaccinations, supporting women's health, and so

forth—while taking account of power and avoiding a positivist view of science in the name of efficiency and expediency. It's equally crucial that we employ such a nuanced approach in our own activism and scholarship.

One might venture to assert that failing to make these distinctions may actually risk missing an opportunity to demonstrate how Trump and his associates are actually the ones in the business of constructing their own reality. In other words, while those working in academic fields like cultural studies are so often victims of the critique that their work is based on a slippery foundation untethered to objective facts or that it represents a dangerous brand of relativism, we might counter that criticism not only with a clear articulation of our understanding of the process of knowledge production but also by offering Trump as an example of someone who truly is engaging in a kind of imaginary thinking disconnected from reality. For our students and for others, we might distinguish between our consideration of hegemony and positionality and Trump's practice of simply creating his own reality. We might take great pleasure, in fact, in distinguishing between useful critiques of objectivity, sometimes misinterpreted as the idea that "everything is subjective," and Trump's pronouncements that something is true simply because helps him advance his agenda, which is actually closer to students' and others' false view of our critiques of positivism. Or could it be, perhaps, that rather than standing in contrast to critical theory, Trump and his colleagues are actually employing it in their very own assault on objectivity?

A recent New York Times article asked precisely this question in its provocative title, "Has Trump Stolen Philosophy's Critical Tools?" Its author, Casey Williams, a literature PhD student, muses, "Trump's playbook should be familiar to any student of critical theory and philosophy. It often feels like Trump has stolen our ideas and weaponized them." 5 Williams points to a 2004 article by Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?" in which the social theorist expresses a similar fear. Pointing to one Republican strategist's proposed tactic of complicating the conversation about global warming by emphasizing the "lack of scientific certainty," Latour recounts his own role in problematizing the presence of objective scientific truth: "I myself have spent some time in the past trying to show "the lack of scientific certainty" inherent in the construction of facts. [...] But I did not exactly aim at fooling the public by obscuring the certainty of a closed argument—or did I? After all, I have been accused of just that sin. Still, I'd like to believe that, on the $contrary, I intended \ to \ \textit{emancipate} \ the \ public \ from \ prematurely \ naturalized \ objectified$ facts." Latour worries that, if, as he fears, he was "foolishly mistaken," "the danger would no longer be coming from an excessive confidence in ideological arguments posturing as matters of fact—as we have learned to combat so efficiently in the past—but from an excessive distrust of good matters of fact disguised as bad ideological biases!" Latour asks, "While we spent years trying to detect the real prejudices hidden behind the appearance of objective statements, do we now have to reveal the real objective and incontrovertible facts hidden behind the *illusion* of prejudices?"

Despite anxiety from both Williams and Latour that perhaps critical theorists' critique of truth and objectivity has been co-opted by those on the right (or by Trump), we must ultimately reject this idea. The notion that Trump has stolen the tools of critical theory feeds into the logic that the critique of positivism and objectivity represents carte blanche to invent facts out of whole cloth. This is not the case. Williams ultimately makes precisely this point. He distinguishes between the idea that "[t]ruth is not found, but made, and making truth means exercising power" and "[t]he reductive version" that "[f]act is fiction, and anything goes." The latter, Williams argues, is the "version of critical social theory that the populist right has seized on and that Trump has made into a powerful weapon." Williams argues that we should not abandon critical theory: "Even in a 'post-truth era,' a

critical attitude allows us to question dominant systems of thought, whether they derive authority from an appearance of neutrality, objectivity or inevitability or from a more Trumpian appeal to alternative facts that dispense with empirical evidence."

Likewise, Latour does not suggest that we completely abandon critiques of objectivity. "I am not trying to reverse course," he admits. But Latour does take issue with the manner in which critical theorists, including himself, have made their critiques. In arguing that we shift our focus from "matters of fact" to "matters of concern," turning our attention from "objects" to "things," Latour points to a kind of smugness with which critical theorists have deployed their critiques, critiques that inadvertently employ positivism themselves and that are constructed so as to ensure success:

You are always right! When naïve believers are clinging forcefully to their objects, claiming that they are made to do things because of their gods, their poetry, their cherished objects, you can turn all of those attachments into so many fetishes and humiliate all the believers by showing that it is nothing but their own projection, that you, yes you alone, can see. But as soon as naïve believers are thus inflated by some belief in their own importance, in their own projective capacity, you strike them by a second uppercut and humiliate them again, this time by showing that, whatever they think, their behavior is entirely determined by the action of powerful causalities coming from objective reality they don't see, but that you, yes you, the never sleeping critic, alone can see. Isn't this fabulous? 10

While Donald Trump has not wielded the tools of critical theory, he has successfully leveraged very real anger and skepticism leveled at critical thinkers who may be offering useful critiques but who often do so with a certain level of smugness. It is, at least in part, this smugness, and not necessarily critical thought, to which skeptical audiences react. We would do well to pause before proudly announcing our location firmly on the higher ground as we look down on Trump and his supporters' relativist claims and dangerous refutations of facts and expertise. Latour envisions a different kind of critic: "The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather. The critic is not the one who alternates haphazardly between antifetishism and positivism like the drunk iconoclast drawn by Goya, but the one for whom, if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution." 11 As Donna Haraway likewise noted, "We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meaning and bodies, but in order to live in meanings and bodies that have a chance for a future." 12

The existence of the smug critic has perhaps contributed to what has recently been lamented by some on the left as the rejection by Trump and his supporters of experts, be it climatologists or legal scholars. And, in fact, in other circumstances, critical theorists have, in their own way, applauded the death of expertise. We have, in other circumstances, shared the delight in taking experts and their positivist thinking down a notch. We might, in fact, agree that "experts" deserve to be checked and questioned. But let us not forget that we, too, are experts. And we are precisely the kind of smug experts Trump supporters reject. We, too, fall prey to anger at the audacity of being ignored.

So while it might feel good to point out that we are the ones doing the *right* kind of critique while Trump is just making stuff up, such a move only moves us closer to an emphasis on facts and a kind of blindness to our own positionality. While there is space, even among critical theorists, for criticizing Trump for inventing facts and accusing those

on the left of the same, we get into tricky territory when this is our emphasis to the exclusion of the more careful work of tracing power relationships and studying the real and potential impact of Trump's presidency. One of the things cultural studies practitioners can offer is nuanced analysis of the relationships of power at play in any proposed policy and an understanding of the social totality surrounding each of Trump's actions. This totality includes ourselves and our coveted tools of critique.

We might look to Donna Haraway's work on situated knowledges for a useful model of how we might "have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects ... and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a 'real' world." 13 Haraway's model escapes the potential for smugness that Latour worries about by recognizing that our accounts of the world are necessarily partial. As Haraway observes, "only partial perspective promises objective vision." 14 In other words, each of us is situated in a particular position, each offering a particular incomplete view. Only in recognizing this can we hope to produce grounded knowledge. We cannot escape responsibility for our accounts, however, nor should we see all accounts as equally positioned. Haraway is just as dismissive of relativism as she is of "totalizing versions of claims to scientific authority." "Relativism," Haraway argues, "is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally. The 'equality' of positioning is a denial of responsibility and critical enquiry." 15 Thus, Haraway sees both claims to total objectivity and relativism as dodging responsibility. In doing so, she brings our attention to the need to account for our positionality and to be responsible for our accounts of the world.

With the partial perspective of situated knowledges, "we might," argues Haraway, "become answerable for what we learn how to see." 16 Haraway also implores us to not simply stop at "acknowledged and self-critical partiality" but to also actively seek out perspectives that might provide "knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organized by axes of domination." 17 Thus, we might maintain our rejection of total objectivity and, with it, the idea that there exists a universal Truth. But we can still account for the "real" world and call out lies and deception. We can do this by understanding that all views, including our own, are partial, but not unaccountable, sidestepping relativism by accounting for both position and power and by tracing the contours of the context in which knowledge making occurs.

In responding to Trump, it is crucial to consider not just the current conjuncture, but the long term effects of the anti-Trump movement as well as the lasting impact of our approach to scholarship, activism, and teaching during the Trump administration. While we may be tempted in this moment to lean on fact-checking and to gravitate toward pithy slogans that declare an allegiance to science and to take comfort in the promise of an objective body of knowledge that can single-handedly shut down Trump with its "truth," we have to remain committed to the messiness of the practice of cultural studies and critical theory. Yes, we should call out Trump for his lies. But we should also acknowledge to our students, colleagues, and fellow activists that while we do not endorse a relativist world where "it's all subjective," we do insist on recognizing and examining the fraught process of knowledge production. Importantly, we must include ourselves and our coveted objects, including our favorite pet theories, among the things that need to be interrogated in such endeavors lest we inadvertently reproduce a new kind of positivist thinking wherein we endorse our objectivity and our truth rather than problematizing the concepts altogether. We must avoid becoming the smug critic and invite conversation rather than seeking to foreclose it. Understanding that all accounts of the world are partial, situated, and embedded in a context of power, we must critique totalizing views and relativism while holding ourselves and others responsible for our accounts. The longterm viability of our field and our activism—and our capacity for navigating "truth" in the Trump era—depend on it.

Notes

- 1. Alan D. Sokal, "A Physicist Experiments with Cultural Studies," April 15, 1996, 4-5, http://www.physics.nyu.edu/sokal/lingua_franca_v4.pdf.
- 2. "About Us: Our Mission," March for Science, https://www.marchforscience.com/mission/.
- 3. "About Us: Our Mission."
- 4. See, for example, Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).
- 5. Casey Williams, "Has Trump Stolen Philosophy's Critical Tools?," *The New York Times*, April 17, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/17/opinion/has-trump-stolen-philosophys-critical-tools.html.
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- 7. Latour, "Why Has Critique," 226–27.
- 8. Williams, "Has Trump Stolen Philosophy's Critical Tools?"
- 9. Latour, "Why Has Critique," 231.
- 10. Latour, "Why Has Critique," 239.
- 11. Latour, "Why Has Critique," 246.
- 12. Donna J. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 187.
- 13. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 187. 2
- 14. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 190.
- 15. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 191. 2
- 16. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 190. 2
- 17. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 192.

å <u>Bio</u>



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Ryan Brownlow and Megan Wood, "Not About White Workers: The Perils of Popular Ethnographic Narrative in the Time of Trump," *Lateral* 6.2 (2017).

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Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

Not About White Workers: The Perils of Popular Ethnographic Narrative in the Time of Trump

Ryan Brownlow and Megan Wood

Introduction

Since the 2016 election of Donald Trump, the US political scene has been animated with efforts on the left and on the right to make sense of an undeniable feeling of crisis. Many of these efforts have focused on a particular group: America's white working class. Immediately after the election, mainstream news media sounded off with headlines like "Why Trump Won: Working-class Whites" (*New York Times*). They identified the election of Trump and racial unrest as the "Revenge of the Forgotten Class" (*ProPublica, Politico*) and their front-pages characterized Trump's election success as "a decisive demonstration of power by a largely overlooked coalition of mostly blue-collar white and working-class voters." Hundreds of political commentators, bloggers, and activists spilled significant ink as they culturally deconstructed the "white working class." These stories which claimed to make sense of the success of Trumpism used exit polls and quantitative voting data to figure a "white working class" based on a dubious composite of demographic factors like education or geography, but what was perhaps more integral to this crystallization of the explanatory power of white working class resentment was the timely emergence of a number of popular ethnographies about "white working class" cultural and political life.

These ethnographic texts devote themselves to accounting for the experiences of the white, rural, poor. Most often, they offer stories about white working-class "cultures in decline" or stories about a "culture of poverty." The narratives tend to suggest that the politics of the workers who live in selected rural areas are motivated by anxiety around issues of automation, globalization, environmental regulation, and/or immigration—issues that are seen as threats to job security—and that the anxiety often manifests itself in the form of conservatism, racism, or xenophobia. In these stories, the white working class is most often attributed a misguided conservative political sensibility, allegedly out of accord with their own best interests, that is motivated by what is described varyingly as a sense of fear, anger, betrayal, or resentment.

This growing body of texts is not a homogenous group; in fact, many of the arguments made among the group contradict each other, and their authors write from a range of political positions, with a wide range of political projects and objectives. The texts make claims to a variety of genres: sometimes they are called "memoir" or "non-fiction" and at other times they make more formal claims to the disciplinary domains of history, anthropology, or sociology. What binds the texts together is a focus on the white working-class (although *who* constitutes the white working-class or *where* precisely that

class is located varies between accounts). The "white working class" in these texts is usually conflated with the population of one of a few geographical regions (e.g., "Rust Belt," "The South," "Coal Country," etc.) and the forms of industrial labor conducted in those areas. The labors traditionally supported in these regions (e.g., manufacturing, coal mining, agriculture, etc.) are, by most accounts, becoming more precarious and less viable as reliable sources of income.

What we are interested in is how the recent emergence, proliferation, and popular success of these texts—texts that center the white working class as a cultural and political problem—seem to be creating a context of their own that enables certain kinds of explanation, rationale, and understanding that are used not only to make sense of the election, but also to breathe new life into old rationales for the Left (and the Right) about strategies of political resistance and opposition. These ethnographies not only enunciate forms of resistive action (e.g. what we will refer to later as the empathy mandate), they are themselves "resistance texts": Hochshild's Strangers in Their Own Land, for instance, graces the top of the Huffington Post's Resistance Bookshelf, which tells you what to read "If you're a part of the Trump resistance." Other texts from this group are featured in vision statements crafted for liberal politics, $\frac{9}{2}$ and they are frequently used in workshops with titles like, "How to Talk to Trump Supporters." 10 Many of the authors of these books have become public intellectuals and political spokespeople for the current US crisis, seemingly overnight, as if they are the endowed ambassadors for the white working class peoples that their books narrate. 11 It is clear, on multiple accounts, that these books have met an unprecedentedly strong appetite among popular audiences, and that they have secured a place in the national, political imagination, especially by way of their uptake in political journalism as "evidence" of the political influence and character of a "white working class." 12 Consequently, one of our most pressing concerns is how the stories about white workers that are first told in the books we have referenced gain new life and meaning as they are taken up in popular and political journalism.

While it is not exactly clear why so many books that narrate white working-class culture and experience are finding themselves successful in the present moment, what is clear is that people around the country and across the political spectrum are looking for answers, for ways to understand what is happening in the country. The fact is that most of the books we are referring to were published before the election and some of them are the product of long-term research projects that would have begun years before Trump's presidential nomination and campaign. None of the books were intended as direct commentary on the electoral victory of Donald Trump, but what is interesting is how (in their timeliness, perhaps) they have become explanations for the current political situation. The convenience (and consequence) of these stories is that they seem to say something new and definitive about class politics in the US in the contemporary moment, they seem to locate a center for national, racial discord, and they seem to illuminate a source for the coming revolution (or catastrophe!).

We are interested in these texts, then, not because of the accounts they offer as much as we are interested in how their success tells us something about *how* people understand (or *want* to understand) what is going on in America. They tell us something about the formation of popular thought in relation to politics in the United States. We are interested, in short, in how these popular ethnographic narratives mobilize certain stories about the current situation; they offer powerful stories about the feelings and lived experiences of one (imagined) class of peoples in the United States. While we recognize that these narratives are in and of themselves interesting, we are more concerned with how the narratives produce and enable certain kinds of explanation while ignoring or foreclosing others. We do not suggest that the stories are unimportant, but rather that

they may be insufficient to understand what is going on and inadequate to the task of imagining better political futures.

Our discussion of the texts is intended as a critique of their use and reception in the current moment, particularly considering their representation and citation as "hard" evidence of a class in crisis, and also how they are being articulated to the current political situation. Journalists and political commentators across the political spectrum have used the books, whether or not they have actually read them, to conjure and reify the assumption that the white working-class is somehow responsible for Trump's success. Assembling popular audiences, these books tell a story about a nation riddled with a complicated politics of feeling. They tell us something about the lived experience and realities of white workers in various locales around the country, and the many ways that those workers are mobilized by right-wing political forces. Our concern, however, is that these narratives offer stories that are too simple, and insufficient.

The editors of this special issue argue that the crisis we are facing is not about Trump. In agreement, the authors of this essay claim that it is equally as important to establish that, contrary to the dominant ways that Trumpism has been diagnosed in public conversation, this crisis is also not about white workers. Furthermore, any modes of resistance and opposition to the (post-populist, fundamentalist, racist, nationalist) forces at play require first that we rethink the tools we use to construct them. Following the aims of this special issue, we focus on political strategies and methods of resistance in the sense that we call for critical and contextual thinking, reading, and acting, especially in the face of a moment defined by a seemingly limitless number of powerful and evocative stories. More deeply, our call is for reimagining our political strategies and activisms on the left, especially to the extent that they hinge upon an engagement with class relations, socio-economic difference, work, and poverty. We insist that the skills we learn as students of cultural studies, with its emphasis on critical and contextual thinking, equip us well for the task of thinking hard about how popular stories often fall flat before the task of understanding what is going on in our world, and how we might imagine our own interventions in a world where those stories proliferate.

Each of the following three sections identifies and discusses different aspects of the problematic we have identified in relation to ethnographies about the "white working class" and their role in producing popular understanding and political consciousness. In these sections, we draw upon the work of practitioners and critics of ethnography, several of the popular ethnographies in question, and offer anecdotes of our own struggle with this story of "white working class" resentment. For the sake of clarity, we limit our engagement here to only two of the ethnographic texts we have discussed: J. D. Vance's Hillbilly Elegy and Arlie Hochschild's Strangers in Their Own Land. There are many reasons we choose to focus on these two texts in particular, but the chief among those reasons is that the authors of these two texts sit on opposite ends of the political spectrum (and yet many of their conclusions, as we will show, are the same). When we discuss the ethnographic narratives in question, our task is not to critique ethnographic field methods nor offer a better model for conducting ethnographic research. $\frac{13}{2}$ Rather, we want to make some suggestions in terms of how we might be more critical readers and interpreters of ethnographic narratives, and how we might cultivate critical reading skills and use them to intervene upon the impoverished and reductive political commentaries and strategies, often spurred by such ethnographic narratives, that are in rampant circulation across the political spectrum. In our conclusion, we offer a few thoughts about how cultural studies might be put to use to help us understand what is going on in our nation and world, and how it might light a path toward a renewed, recontextualized politics of class.

1. The Problem of Taking Ethnographic Narratives For Granted

One of our primary concerns about the aforementioned ethnographic narratives relates to how they have become a facet of popular culture and political explanation, exceeding the scope of any academic, disciplinary practice that might formally be understood as "ethnography." We wonder what their popular status means about their circulation and reception, and also about the kind of thinking they produce, especially in the wake of the election. For nearly half a century (or more), practitioners and critics of ethnography have wondered about the contributions that ethnographic practice can make in its relation to a broader project of critical, contextual analysis that aims to put culture into conversation with things that are usually understood as non-cultural (e.g., economics or politics). These writers have questioned what ethnographic research can tell us about the world and what it cannot, and thus, they have also reckoned with the critical limitations of ethnographic narrative as a form of explanation. Unfortunately, in the popular circulation of contemporary ethnographies that focus on the feelings, labors, and traditions of white and rural populations, the lessons offered to us by these insightful practitioners and critics are lost. In the contemporary moment, as these popular ethnographic tales are taken up by journalists as political explanations for both the election of Trump and for a perceived crisis in American politics, ¹⁴ we find that they are too often taken as "raw data," assumed to speak transparently about the way things are for specific populations in specific regions of the United States—or worse, for the country as a whole. While many of us who have encountered ethnography in academic contexts are quite clear about its limitations, it bears repeating here that there is nothing transparent about ethnography.

Ethnography is an interpretive enterprise on multiple accounts and, considered within its history as an academic practice, it has long been understood as such. From the embodied encounters that constitute fieldwork practices to the writing of ethnographic field notes to the print publication of ethnographic narratives, the interpretation and translation (a kind of interpretation in and of itself) of lived cultural meanings constitute the definitive of ethnography as an academic practice—the difficult negotiations made in the act of translating fieldwork experience into narrative form—are foregrounded in graduate training for students of ethnography, and are also thoroughly reckoned with in the methodological discourses of anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and related fields. 16 For precisely these reasons, the popular embrace of ethnographic stories as straightforward explanations for our current political situation concerns us; from what we gather, the reception of these stories by popular audiences and their circulation in popular forums seems to be predicated on a number of misunderstandings about what ethnography is, what ethnographic practice can and cannot do, and what kind of explanations ethnographic narratives offer.

It is important to recognize, as a start, that the demographic categories that are mobilized in ethnographic work—in this case categories that refer to populations of rural and white laborers—are themselves constructed and accrue histories that bind their reference with other cultural forms beyond the purview of ethnography. ¹⁷ It is crucial to understand that ethnographic writing relies upon "expressive tropes, figures, and allegories" as it attempts to make legible the subject of its description. ¹⁸ The demographic categories that are reified in ethnographic description are themselves contingent upon a whole series of tropes; in the case of the demographic category of the white working class, these tropes often connect working classness with longstanding cultural assumptions that relate more to the cultural arenas of education, tradition, and lifestyle, as well as the markers of geographic region (e.g., whiteness, ruralness, uneducatedness), than they do to the

material conditions of class. It begins to seem as if references to culture are the only things that speak to class at all. We have to ask ourselves: what is the relationship of culture to class? In the context of cultural studies, this very problem—the question of how to adequately account for the cultural dimensions of class without losing sight of the structural analysis that is necessary for understanding class and its relationship to the broader workings of capitalism—has an important history, and has been the source of decades of debate. While we could not begin to recount those debates here with any justice, we do want to insist that the question remains unresolved.

One of the major risks of these ethnographic stories about resentful white workers, whether they hail from J.D. Vance's Rust Belt hometown or the region of Louisiana that Arlie Hochschild has described as the "Super South," is that they offer cultural explanations, often exclusively, for economic circumstances and political situations. 20 In asserting (a retrograde, values-rich, traditional, etc.) "culture" as an adequate framework for understanding economics and politics, these stories pathologize culture and mobilize already existing allegories about the causes of political and economic hardship. Offering narratives about rural "cultures of poverty" or white "cultures in decline," ironically enough, these stories rehearse many problematic cultural narratives that have, in other instances, been used to explain the economic and political hardships experienced by people of color, most especially as an explanation for black poverty, reducing those lived hardships to symptoms of some "cyclical" form of cultural illness, always at the expense of eschewing (or outright denying) the role of systemic disenfranchisement. 21 While we do not intend to suggest any equivalency between these two very different projects of cultural explanation, we find it necessary to notice when and how existing cultural explanations are reproduced. 22

J.D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy* is particularly insidious in terms of its reliance upon cultural pathology as an explanation for class conditions, reinvigorating the allegory of a "culture of poverty" in a number of personal anecdotes that damn the white working poor, blaming them for their own hardship, suggesting that they are bound up in a cyclical cultural crisis defined by addiction and greed. Consider, for instance, this brief excerpt from his book:

During my junior year of high school, our neighbor Pattie called her landlord to report a leaky roof. The landlord arrived and found Pattie topless, stoned, and unconscious on her living room couch. Upstairs the bathtub was overflowinghence, the leaking roof. Pattie had apparently drawn herself a bath, taken a few prescription painkillers, and passed out. The top floor of her home and many of her family's possessions were ruined. This is the reality of our community. It's about a naked druggie destroying what little value exists in her life. It's about children who lose their toys and clothes to a mother's addiction. 23

While startling in its graphic description, in conclusion Vance's anecdote lands upon a moral indictment, and merely rehearses a story that we have already heard about the working (and not working) poor. It is a story that emphasizes their "undeserving" and "irresponsible" qualities, suggesting that they are doomed to repeat the failures that keep them in a cycle of poverty. While Vance's book offers little analysis of the conditions that produce the circumstances in which things like addiction and parenting can become problems for the working poor—and while it has little to say about the systems that work to keep the poor poor—his book does offer a kind of explanation for poverty that hinges upon moral judgments of character and behavior. He summarizes his position succinctly: "This was my world: a world of truly irrational behavior. We spend our way into the poorhouse . . . We know we shouldn't spend like this. Sometimes we beat ourselves up over it, but we do it anyway."²⁴ Recycling an allegorical narrative that moralizes and pathologizes the poverty cycle through the guise of a kind of cultural piety, dismissing it as

the product of indulgence and greed, Vance blames workers for their plights and reifies the idea that their lifestyle can be explained away as "irrational behavior." Hopefully, the dangers of this kind of narrative are clear to our readers. What remains worrisome to us, however, is that Vance's claim to firsthand experience, as supposedly a member of the demographic in question(notice the "we"), is being too readily acclaimed as authoritative in its vision of rural poverty, ²⁵ especially by journalists who use his narrative to support their own political analyses. ²⁶

Our major concern here, stated more directly, is that stories like the one offered by Vance participate in a broader trend in popular US thought that elevates the markers of working class *culture* far above the *material conditions* of class. In overemphasizing these cultural markers - markers that include education, health, family lifestyles, etc. - they forget to ask a question that should be central to the project of writing about the white working class (as an allegedly cultural group), or any working class at all: what is the working class? This is not to say that there is no white working class culture, but rather that in stories like the ones being offered by Vance (and Hochschild for that matter), the cultural markers of "working classness" are being disarticulated from (to the point of imprudently obfuscating) the changing material conditions that are definitive of the working class position, such that it is not even clear that the demographics narrated in these stories are working class at all. 27 In reifying a demographic category that means to refer to workers who are poor and white, and in doing so almost exclusively through an invocation of cultural tropes that signal "working classness," these stories remain uncritical about how things have changed in the United States. Class is not as straightforward as this; it cannot be easily codified by cultural tropes, nor bounded by geographic regions or zip-codes: class is a structural position within the system of capitalism. What can we really claim to know about class by reading ethnographies about rural, white conservatives? Does being angry or white or rural or conservative necessarily make you working class? Aren't the relations between classes of workers in the present moment more complex than that? What do these stories really tell us about our current political situation?

2. The Problem of Taking Up Empathy & Blame as Political Strategies

A second major concern that we wish to raise in regards to the ethnographic accounts offered by Hochschild and Vance, as well as their numerous other contemporaries, is that the stories they tell are further amplifying a political mandate, quite vogue in the wake of Trump's election, that asserts interpersonal communication as an efficacious political strategy and suggests that our current crisis is the simple product of the Left's inability to adequately negotiate a national politics of feeling. To clarify, we do not doubt the significance and power of communication; in fact, we teach courses exclusively devoted to skillful communication practices and are well attuned to the importance of continuing to question how we all, regardless of our political dispositions, might learn to speak across our differences. Rather, we see that there is again a misunderstanding of the role played by this sort of strategy in relation to political change, and are concerned with the ways that this focus misdirects political strategy on the Left by obfuscating our vision of capitalism and how it works. In the case of the so-called white working classes, the story is all too familiar: we all suffer the rage of angry workers, white and rural, because we ignore them. In too many instances, this leads to a schismatic condition on the Left. We tear back and forth between extremes in our reaction to the pervasive stories about white workers, recognizing them only as the subjects of either a nascent empathy (we must understand them!) or aggressive blame (it is all their fault!)—two sides of the same coin.

If we return to the two primary texts in question, Vance's Hillbilly Elegy and Hochschild's Strangers in Their Own Land, we can see how this kind of politics of feeling is exacerbated in the stories they tell, and also the ways in which their own political commitments have shaped their texts. Vance's text, as we have shown in the previous section, recites a narrative of cultural pathology and thus, concurrently, a "bootstraps" story about what is possible with a little hard work, ignoring the need for systemic understandings of class stratification. His text most readily espouses blame as the appropriate response to white "cultures in decline," suggesting not only that these cultural actors ought to be blamed for their own plight, but also that they are are somehow responsible for the current political crisis. 28 In the end, his narrative of blame is still a kind of call for empathic understanding (thus, the other side of the empathy coin) that suggests the national preponderance of confusion in the wake of Trump's election is the direct result of a collective lack of understanding about rural (and white) lifestyles. And so it goes: if only we knew the white working poor, we wouldn't be surprised. We might also notice how Vance's formal claim to "memoir," his authoritative claim to speak as an "insider" to the "cultural group" in question, contributes to the distinctive tone of his appraisal. It is perhaps unsurprising that this particular claim to proximity supports his blunt and somewhat scathing capacity to incite blame, once and for all, as the appropriate emotional response to white workers and their role in the crisis, even as this "blame" is ostensibly meant to be a loving lecture to the white working class on the importance of self-responsibility.

By contrast, speaking to empathy from the other side of the fence—or, to borrow a phrase from her own parlance, the other side of the "empathy wall"—Hochschild emphatically suggests that the failure of the Left in the current crisis is a failure to understand and feel, intimately, the particular plights of white and rural populations. Self-proclaimed Berkeley liberal and professor emerita of sociology, Hochschild's investment in empathy as a political strategy is inherent to her entire ethnographic project, informing her research questions as well as her approach to fieldwork. Rather than the jaded insider—Vance's projected disposition—Hochschild positions herself as an ethnographer proper: the curious outsider wading into an unknown territory, framing her ethnography's subjects as "others," and establishing an "us and them" narrative from the outset. Consider this passage, for instance, that summarizes Hochschild's project by narrating her encounters with two ethnographic subjects:

As I walked with Mike Schaff through the sugarcane fields of the old Armelise Plantation, or sat with Madonna in the Living Way Pentecostal Church, I was discovering good people at the center of this Great Paradox. How could kindly Madonna oppose government help for the poor? How could a warm, bright, thoughtful man like Mike Schaff, a victim of corporate malfeasance and wanton destruction, aim so much of his fire at the federal government?²⁹

Describing her mission as a "journey into the heart of the right," and as an effort to "scale" the "empathy walls" that separate the well-intended Left from the conservative poor, Hochschild performatively invokes her own confusion as to how "good" people could practice such "bad" politics. In her book's concluding chapter, she reinstates her conviction that empathetic understanding just might be the cure for our most pressing political problems, in the form of two letters: one letter is addressed from Hochschild to "a friend on the liberal left" and the other is addressed to Hochschild's "Louisiana friends on the right." In both letters, she calls for empathy, for common understanding, and asserts the value of trying to understand how the politics of the "other side" are motivated by differential feelings, often feelings of anger and resentment.

We call the kind of political strategy proffered in Hochschild's narrative, and also to a degree in the narrative offered by Vance (albeit somewhat differently), the *empathy*

mandate. The empathy mandate, in its specific articulation to the white working class, suggests that our political situation will only continue to grow worse until we can find the adequate way to understand those white workers who (supposedly) are so much unlike ourselves. The empathy mandate has spawned a whole number of political strategies, among activists and well-intentioned intellectuals, that demand our political efforts be focused on engaging white working class Trump supporters in direct conversation with an intention to understand their worldview. One of the ironies of this mandate, of course, is that it renders empathy a merely strategic activity that is aimed at certain kinds of political gain. The paradox of this call—a call to, on the one hand, genuinely listen and understand and, on the other, maintain an agenda for partisan conversion—only further proliferates confusion on the Left. This is not even to mention the fact that it is not clear whether and how "the white working class" is in fact the "problem population" the Left must grapple with (empathetically or otherwise). Populist articulations of the feelings of racial and political/partisan resentment are not new among working, lower, and even middle classes in US history; neither is the political utility of calls to empathy. 31

In many ways, we understand this impulse to empathy, and recognize in ourselves the kinds of political feeling that make it seem both practical and so obviously necessary. As graduate students, we enter the academy from communities and geographies not unlike those narrated by Vance and Hochschild: one of us hails from the trailer parks of rural Texas, an epicenter of poverty and addiction, and the other from a rural, conservative, farm town in the Blue Ridge Mountains of southwest Virginia. We have often felt that, especially in academic spaces, these communities and geographies are misunderstood, and are too readily invoked as scapegoats for the purposes of explaining white supremacy (as if liberal whites have no role in it) and political catastrophe (as in the case of explaining Trump). 32 We do think that there is much to learn from the cultural practices and traditions that often define the lifestyles of white and rural populations—be they working class or otherwise—and probably equally as much about those cultures that needs to be pulled apart and critically questioned. The turn to empathy, as we see it, is not void of possibilities nor promises, but even still we question its viability as a strategy for achieving political change and as an explanation for understanding what is going on in America during (and after) Trump's reign as president. To be more direct, we are concerned that the politics of feeling that emphasizes the "woundedness" of rural whites—and white conservatives writ large—has been far more successful on the right than it has on the left, particularly when it is sutured to a kind of cultural groupism (an appeal to all those who can claim affinity with white working classness, whether or not they are working class). As Adam King observed of Hochschild's ethnography, this approach does not create the conditions for strategizing in working people's interests; it instead instantiates "a vision of the world in which class unity is unthinkable. Or worse, a world in which 'Trump [is] the identity politics candidate for white men." 33 We want to consider how we can redirect this energy not toward a mandated empathy directed at a political "other" but toward instead a class-based politics that emphasizes the potential affinities that emerge from the articulations that conjoin the material conditions of our experience together with our cultural experiences and feelings. The situation has become trite, all this vying for the "heart" of rural "working-class" whites, and we wonder what other political roads we might travel, perhaps roads that lead instead toward working hands and feet and minds. Is there something alternative to playing into the politics of feeling already on offer?

3. The Problem of Our Political Situation

Finally, building on our arguments in the previous sections, our foremost concern is how the ethnographic stories we have discussed are being used to prescribe political thought and action in the current US crisis. To reiterate, we find it necessary to ask: *what happens*

when working class culture, or "working classness," is disarticulated from the material conditions of class? The question of the relationship between culture and economy, we again reiterate, is not new. Cultural studies work on class has long considered the ways economic and cultural categories are fused in experience. However, our concern is that when categories like "working class culture" or "white working class" are used in analysis, they are not historicized and contextualized, and the question of the fusion of economic and cultural factors—"how economic relations directly and materially intervene to shape people's representations of the world" 34—is not made central. In this case, what we find are static, inconsistent, and nevertheless politically opportune mobilizations of a fictional and rhetorical white working class to energize political projects on the right: these projects have been successful in large part precisely because they have been able to divorce problems of culture (often in terms of race, but we also see it in terms of geography, values, taste, memory, and legacy) from issues of class position. 35 The political climate produced by such maneuvers has landed the Left in the midst of what we have discussed as a politics of feeling—but what does this particular politics of feeling get us? If the answer is, as it seems to be, not much, then we wonder if there is a way out. Above all, we want to imagine how our political *now* might be a ripe moment for re-thinking class and how class might be mobilized for a future politics: a politics that does not simply repeat old strategies of class-based organizing nor rely exclusively upon this politics of feeling. As intellectuals, it is not our argument that we should return to a more "traditional" kind of Marxist analysis per se, but rather that we can (and must) imagine a more complicated approach to class—as well as the relationship between class and culture—for the purpose of understanding how changing experiences of work or labor might produce unanticipated political possibilities and affinities.

We want to push back against the reduction of "working class" to an identity category or cultural marker, and at the same time we want to resist rehearsing old Marxist dismissals of the significance of culture (as merely the "superstructure" expressions of an economic "base"). What we want to insist upon is a reckoning with how class has changed. We cannot in any simple way presume to know how it works. We need better analytical tools and more adequate theories. Furthermore, especially in light of the whirlwind of emotions that are being catalyzed by ethnographic stories about white workers, we want to insist on the necessity of critical thought and contextual analysis as themselves direct contributions to the political struggle. In a moment when things seem so urgent and unhinged, it is easy to sweep criticism under the rug in favor of more direct forms of action, especially because good critical work takes time and its effects are hard to measure. Nevertheless, our analytical categories inform, at least to some degree, how we know to act (we have already discussed this in regards to the strategies related to the empathy mandate). Any political action we take, in other words, is necessarily predicated on the critiques we know how to articulate. For this reason, we ought to have good critiques.

Conclusion

In this essay, we have raised concerns about the popular success of contemporary ethnographies that focus on the rural and white "working class," and have questioned the ways that, in those ethnographies, "working class" has come to signify a range of cultural meanings that displace its meanings as a socio-economic reference. In doing so, we identified three major problems that relate to those ethnographies and how they have been taken up as political explanations. First, we argued that the ethnographies, in their popular circulation, are not being treated critically—as partial accounts of a limited cultural experience—and are instead being taken for granted as straightforward political and economic analyses. Second, we argued that the ethnographies are exacerbating the

effects of existing narratives about the role of feelings in the contemporary political life of our country and further, that they are amplifying what we have called the "empathy mandate"—a mandate that demands that our political actions center on trying to understand misunderstood populations (in this case, the so-called "white working class"). Third, we argued that by disarticulating the cultural markers of "working classness" from the material conditions of class, the ethnographies are part and parcel of a political conundrum that requires from us more discernment and critical thought about just what "working class" means for our politics. In conclusion, we want to repeat that it is of utmost importance, especially in times of crisis, to stop and think about the stories that undergird our political actions and strategies. The ethnographies of "white working class" experience that we have engaged in this essay may be of use in this effort, but only if we treat them as small openings that lead to bigger and broader stories—as mere beginnings—rather than as complete and transparent explanations for what is going on.

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- 5. Titles include the following, but there are many more: Nancy Isenberg, White Trash (New York: Penguin Books, 2017); Justin Gest, The New Minority (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Arlie Russell Hochschild, Strangers in Their Own Land (New York: The New Press, 2016); Katherine Cramer, The Politics of Resentment (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); J. D. Vance, Hillbilly Elegy (New York: HarperCollins, 2016); Carol Anderson, White Rage (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017).
- 6. While some of the texts are memoirs, histories, or works of journalistic non-fiction, they are all "ethnographic" in the sense that they, like ethnography, take as their

- subject a specific group of people, understood as a cultural group, and also in the sense that they seek to offer interpretations of the meaning-systems that structure experiences within that group. In the same way that something in a form other than cinema might be described as "cinematic," we refer to this whole body of literature as "ethnographic" to suggest that the texts that constitute it maintain a certain relationship to ethnography.
- 7. For a discussion of how claims about white working class are not new and why that matters, see Lawrence Grossberg, *We All Want to Change the World: The Paradox of the U.S. Left: A Polemic* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2016).
- 8. Bob Burnett, "The Resistance Bookshelf," *The Huffington Post*, July 7, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/the-resistance-bookshelf_us_595f8504e4b08f5c97d068d1.
- 9. George Lakey, "Reaching Trump Supporters with the Promise of Vision," *Resilience*, January 30, 2017, http://www.resilience.org/stories/2017-01-30/reaching-trump-supporters-with-the-promise-of-vision/.
- 10. "How to Talk to Trump Supporters," *Indivisible Berkeley*, June 17, 2017, https://www.indivisibleberkeley.org/events/2017/6/17/how-to-talk-to-trump-supporters.
- 11. J. D. Vance, for instance, has made appearances on nearly every major news station and has even given his own TED Talk. Arlie Hochschild has appeared on Democracy Now and C-SPAN, among many other forums for coverage on current political affairs. This is only a sampling of the public life of these books and their authors, but we hope it is enough to support our claim that these books have found an unprecedented momentum in public and popular discourse.
- 12. Walk into any of your local bookstores and you will likely see a table set up with a display of some selection of these titles featured together, propped up for customers to see, under some banner like "Current Affairs" or "US Politics" or "Understanding Trump." You will see the small medals printed on the covers designating their awards and you will see "NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER" printed across their covers in bold. It seems likely that many who have never—or will never—read these titles will nevertheless know about these books and have a general sense of their explanatory value; individually and as a whole, these texts have secured status in terms of popular recognition.
- 13. Furthermore, there are many examples of ethnographic writing on class and culture that we would deem "good" ethnography—complex accounts of the materialities of the lived experiences of class and culture—that we do not consider here. Many (if not most) of these "good" ethnographic texts circulate within academic contexts but rarely surface in the pools of popular readership. The ethnographic narratives that we examine in this article are of interest to us precisely because of their popular status. These texts, unlike many of their textual cousins in the academy, have made their way onto every Barnes & Noble display stand and Amazon homepage in the nation, their authors have been courted by mainstream news stations, and their arguments are cited by journalists from across the political spectrum. It is not the question of ethnographic efficacy that we take on here; rather, it is the question of the construction of popular opinion and political thought—for which, in the current conjuncture, a particular breed of ethnographic narrative has become a primary resource.
- 14. Ian Jack, "How a Memoir of Rust-Belt Family Life Caught the Spirit of Modern America," *The Guardian*, January 13, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/13/rust-belt-america-jd-vance-hillbilly-elegy.

- 15. See, for instance, Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: *Basic Books*, 1973); Dwight Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics," in *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013). ▶
- 16. James Clifford quoted in Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography," 83. 2
- 17. White working classness, as a characteristic or idea, is as much indebted to forms of literature and popular culture as it is to ethnographic or demographic research. From the literature and journalism of James Agee to, more recently, the television series *Duck Dynasty*, white working classness has become a marker defined in many ways by the aesthetic qualities of certain lifestyles and their representation in popular forms.
- 18. James Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley, CA: University of California Pres, 1986), 6-7.
- 19. Richard Johnson, "Three Problematics: Elements of a Theory of Working-Class Culture," in *CCCS Selected Working Papers: Volume 1*, eds. A. Gray, J. Campbell, M. Erickson, S. Hanson, & H. Wood (London: Routledge, 2013).
- 20. Juan Gonzalez, "What Drives Trump Supporters?: Sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild on Anger & Mourning of the Right," *Democracy Now*, September 28, 2016,
 - $https://www.democracynow.org/2016/9/28/what_drives_trump_supporters_sociologist_arlie. \\$
- 21. We think, for instance, about the now-infamous 1965 report conducted by sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, also known as the "Moynihan Report," in which Moynihan articulates the perceived plight of poor, black families to a perceived crisis of black fatherhood. Rather than acknowledging the systemic workings of inequity and the after-effects of slavery, Moynihan (a well-intentioned liberal) affirms that the problem of black poverty hinges upon the cultural domain of family lifestyle, pathologizing single-headed black households, locating them as the source of the "problem."
- 22. John Thomason, "Hillbilly Ethnography," *The New Inquiry*, November 29, 2016, https://thenewinquiry.com/hillbilly-ethnography/.
- 23. Vance, Hillbilly Elegy, 145.
- 24. Vance, Hillbilly Elegy, 146.
- 25. An important note: Vance is now a wealthy conservative and has argued that government aid for the poor is a part of the problem, culturally rooted, that keeps rural whites in poverty.
- 26. We find it shocking, for instance, that a review in the *New York Times* praises Vance's text, and bolsters its claim to authority, by describing it as "a compassionate, discerning sociological analysis of the white underclass that has helped drive the politics of rebellion, particularly the ascent of Donald J. Trump." Jennifer Senior, "Review: In 'Hillbilly Elegy,' a Tough Love Analysis of the Poor Who Back Trump," *New York Times*, August 10, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/11/books/review-in-hillbilly-elegy-a-compassionate-analysis-of-the-poor-who-love-trump.html.

- 27. In Hochschild's narrative for instance, some of the subjects interviewed are business owners and entrepreneurs, and even still her book is heralded as a rap on the "white working class." J.D. Vance still claims the title "working class," and his claim is validated by many journalists unquestioningly, even though he is now quite wealthy and employed by a venture capital firm. This slippage between "working class" as a cultural signifier (or marker of identity) and "working class" as a structured position within capitalism, relates directly to our overarching concerns.
- 28. Michael Barbaro, "Understanding the Trump Voter," *New York Times*, August 19, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/19/podcasts/understanding-the-trump-voter.html.
- 29. Hochschild, Strangers, 23. 2
- 30. Hochschild, Strangers, 233-236.
- 31. Elsewhere, we unsettle the persistent theoretical links between education and class and easy assumptions about the relationship between material conditions, culture, and identity by examining the kinds of claims made of voting data, exit polls, and ethnographic narratives. We challenge the relationship of the "white working class" to Trumpism, and make the case that Trumpism involves an effort to assemble nonworking-class allegiance to a particular political project through affective investment in some culturally crafted "working-classness"—a cocktail of *selective* nostalgia for the external characteristics of an archaized, nonconformist "working-class way of life" (traditions, values, speech, etc.), opposition to elitism, American exceptionalism and nationalism, and racial anxiety—disarticulated from the material conditions of class itself. We argue, in other words, that an idea of white working-classness, not by or for the materially working class, has become a feature of the current affective landscape. Megan Wood, Ryan Brownlow, Jing Jiang, "The Work of Working-Classness: Contesting Class in the Current Conjuncture," *New Formations*, forthcoming in 'This Conjuncture' special issue.
- 32. In the months after the election, the "white working class"—what some liberals called "low information voters"—was often appraised as responsible for Trump's victory.

 The "revenge of working-class whites" became the dominant narrative, even months later when the American National Election study, the Rothwell study, and other thorough credible analyses thoroughly debunked that conclusion.
- 33. Adam King, "Strangers and Enemies," *Jacobin*, January 25, 2017, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/01/hochschild-white-workers-trump-race-class/.
- 34. Patrick Joyce, "Review: Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory by John Clarke; Charles Critcher; Richard Johnson," *Social History* 6, no. 3 (1981): 393–395.
- 35. Nixon's so-called "Southern Strategy" is a good example of how this has been mobilized in the past, and we can also see it in Trump's campaign speeches, as well as his "Victory Tour" appeals to Rust Belt workers.





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≜ Bio



Megan Wood

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Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

The Trump Wall: a Cultural Wall and a Cultural War

Mimi Yang

The Trump presidency has come as a surprise to many who had not fully realized a wall-building terrain had harbored and produced a wall-builder like Trump. To fulfill his high-profile campaign pledge, presumably, the proposed wall on the US-Mexico border (a.k.a. the Trump Wall) portends a unified front to protect, defend, and define what America is and what makes America great again. It would certainly be self-affirming to be able to erect a "great, great" American wall to stop the illegal immigration from the south and kick out "bad hombres" from within the wall. However, do Americans share values integrated enough, frameworks cohesive enough, and narratives coherent enough to come up with a unified front of American interests and an American cultural identity, neatly delineated by the Trump Wall? The question reopens historical wounds inflicted and sustained by cultural wars since the Independence War against the British Empire.

Ignited by the unbridgeable divide in race, religion, gender, class, sexuality, and ability, the cultural wars have been fought along the American history at different times and in various contexts. Starting from the Founding Fathers to the present day, attempts have been made to forge a coherent American narrative so that an American cultural identity can be constructed. The Trump era writes such an American narrative by intensifying racial tensions and heightening xenophobia, which lead to a "compulsory patriotism" rallying behind "American" interests and values. After more than a year, the Trump presidency has made it abundantly clear that there is no one single America but multiple ones intersecting with one another, and he is the president of the divided states of America. The cultural war on who has a say about what America is or should be did not start from the Trump era, but has been fueled and repurposed by his racist, misogynic, and anti-Muslim rhetoric among many other derisive statements about minorities and marginalized groups. In the crossfire of the cultural war, this essay has its focus on racial and cultural fronts within the US society.

The nation's narrative has already been inherently divided by the white protestants of European descent, the African Americans, the Muslim Americans, the Hispanic Americans (Mexican immigrants in particular), the Asian Americans, the American Indians, the LGBTQ Americans, and the disabled Americans. However, the ownership of Americanness is not equally shared as there can only be one ruling group to have a say about American values and interests. History has proven that European descent and white Americans have always occupied that culturally authoritarian center. Many of this group responded enthusiastically to Trump's slogan "Make America Great Again." When delving into Trump's support base, Jesse Myerson in her *Nation* article "Trumpism: It's Coming from the Suburbs—Racism, Fascism and Working-Class Americans" differentiates two types of white Americans, the working class and the affluent ones. ² To her the poor whites are

mere scapegoats and "Trump's real base, the actual backbone of fascism, isn't poor and working-class voters, but middle-class and affluent whites" who are "often self-employed, possessed of a retirement account and a home as a nest egg \dots could become the haute bourgeoisie—the storied 1 percent." 3

To grasp how the cultural wall results in the cultural war, let's zoom into the group that the Trump Wall appeals to—the populist wall building group. This is a significantly influential group and played the support base for Trump during the 2016 presidential campaign. Many of them are from the Rust Belt, disenfranchised and left behind by the globalization. Not really equipped with college education and not really conversant with twenty-first-century global landscape and knowledge, they believe that their economic opportunities are taken away by Mexicans and other foreigners, worry that Spanish is taking over English, that American values get eroded due to legal or illegal immigrants, and that co-existence with non-Christian traditions and non-white European heritages threatens what they grew up with. In that sense, a wall would be a clean cut that draws an impassable line to include those who share their worldviews and their cognitive frameworks, and exclude those who hold a different perspective and believe an evolving and transforming definition of what America is.

When Trump signs the executive order and vows to build a "great, great" wall on the US-Mexico border, two things have happened. First, a wall-mindset has been brought to light from underneath. Second, a cultural war on cultural walls is breaking out. In making America great, history is replete with race-, culture-, and religion-based selections, ejections, rejections, and exclusions. There has always existed the need for a wall to filter in and out individuals, groups, and ideas. The filtered-in get to celebrate and shape America and the filtered-out absorb humiliations and sustain injuries and bleedings. In the greatest democracy on earth, equivalent to the biblical promised land, a wall that divides and hierarchizes races, cultures, and religions is bound to instigate cultural wars.

Emboldened by Trump's culturally encoded message to "Make America Great Again," bigotry and hatred towards those who are from a non-white race and a non-Christian religion has been openly displayed. The n-word has come back to the English vocabulary, hate crimes committed against Muslims are no longer a surprise, the undocumented Mexican immigrants live in daily fear for deportation, and Asian Americans are reminded of the days when the Chinese Exclusion Act and Japanese Internment Camps were in place. Somehow the clock in 2018 is turning back, and somehow the basic human rights for racial and cultural equality achieved through bloodshed from previous cultural wars are now in jeopardy. The country in the depth of its psyche engages in a new cultural war along both sides of the Trump Wall.

In a 2004 issue of *American Literary History*, Malini Johar Schueller gathers a collection of "essays on Native American interpellation (Magdaleno), Caribbean women (Cobham), Arab Americans (Majaj), Puerto Rican identity (Flores), Filipino-American identity (Strobel), and African American and Chicana writers (Salazar)," and aligns them in an interplay with the ruling class' central position. From a postcolonial perspective, Schueller acknowledges cultural, historical, and identity issues within specific minority communities, and testifies to Homi Bhabha's ideas of hybridity or third space.

Nonetheless, there has always existed an established and authoritarian narrative dictating and programing an American cultural mind. As early as 1893, when Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis points out an American character forged upon crossing westward frontiers, the cultural space of the indigenous and the African Americans are completely left out of scene. The Frontier Thesis often deems them as barbaric nonentities, and inferior to the grand character-building of those of European descent, the protestant base, and white race. James Morone traces back to the generations of the 50s

and the 60s, highlighting the two trends, embodied in Daniel Boorstin's trilogy *The Americans: the National Experience* (1965) and John Hingham's essay "The Cult of American Consensus: Homogenizing Our History" (1959). One essentializes the national experience à la Turner and one begins to give voices previously unacknowledged.

The Trump era polarizes the two directions—the essentialized and the pluralistic—in defining American interests, values, and cultural identity. The essentialists inside the wall consider themselves defenders of American values and economic opportunities. The pluralists on the other side of the wall are enemies who disrupt American way of life and invaders who take away American jobs, and make the country "un-American," euphoric term of "un-white." The Trump Wall will be built on US-Mexico border, a battleground where a black-and-white scheme places everyone in an "us-or-them" position. Such a dichotomous scheme energizes the populist supporters of the Trump Wall and boxes more than half of the population into the category of the less American or simply the un-American. "Americans" and "un-Americans" confront each other as adversaries.

When we turn our eyes onto the polarizing, the speech and act of cultural exclusion surface more explicitly than ever since the civil rights movement; they collide with the values of multiculturalism and multiracialism. This leads to more fundamental and yet perennial questions head-on: who defines American values and shapes American cultural identity? To whom does the American culture belong? An attempt to answer these questions catapults one into the forefront and the crossfires of the cultural war in the aftermath of Trump's rise to the presidency. More than a decade ago, Schueller situated the cultural war under postcolonial lenses: "Once we begin to think of Native Americans, Mexican Americans, African Americans, and Asian Americans as part of the subjects of America, the questions raised by a postcolonial American studies rapidly change. Models of internal colonization are implicitly assumed." In his presidential address to the American Studies Association in 1989, Allen F. Davis critiques provincialism and chauvinism in American Studies, and highlights "a number of scholars worried about this uncritical patriotism and nationalism." In a baffling moment of history like this, the Trump slogan "Make America Great Again" appeals to a patriotism, but an "uncritical patriotism," if not a "compulsory patriotism" and a cultural "chauvinism." This causes a new cultural war as a result of the "internal colonization" that creates a neat hierarchy with European descent, protestant religion, and native English language on the top and the center. The Americans who do not fall into the top category now need to reevaluate if they fit with the "American standards" devised by those at the top and the center. Some, especially African Americans, Muslim Americans, and DACA recipients, have to struggle to find or relocate a space and a place in the Trump's Great America narrative. The Trump Wall divides and decides who gets to be within the wall and who gets out. The two sides of the wall wage a familiar cultural war, but now the Trump Wall is in between as a battle line, culturally and psychologically.

In a fear- and distrust-filled time, an attempt to assert a position on either side of the Trump Wall would undoubtedly catapult one into crisscrossed currents and fires of emotions, identities, values, ideas, beliefs, and political positions, thus opening a giant can of worms that cross walls and enter wars. The ones inside the Wall have been winners of history and have enjoyed the democracy that the Founding Fathers had envisioned, fought for, and laid out in US nation-building and American citizenry. Although there are undeniable frictions and competitions among the "insiders," they find themselves immediately aligned once they face the challenges or perceived threats from the "outsiders." The similarities in race, religion, cultural practices, and, in some cases, linguistic affinity draw an exclusive line in a multiracial and multicultural America. The Trump Wall parallels such an exclusive line and helps to "filter through" cultural "impurity."

This cultural war is about whether to hold firm the exclusive line or break through it so that the "insiders" and the "outsiders" mingle and share the same cultural space and political place. A non-negotiable and obsolete center-periphery posture brings about the fight about cultural borders and creates borderlands.

Schueller's essay further points out that "the borders school, influenced most significantly by Chicano/a studies, is the domain in which the most productive exchanges with postcolonial studies will be carried out, particularly in the shared areas of transnationalism and diaspora, whiteness studies, and feminism." If we transplant the argument into the current cultural warfare in US society in 2018, transnationalism, diaspora, whiteness studies, and feminism take on a whole new meaning. Chicano/a studies, with its distinctive discourses on borders, borderlands, fluid national and cultural identities and shifting linguistic codes, should cause both sides of the Trump Wall to stop seeing cultural and racial differences as antagonistic and dichotomous, but see them as dialectic and interdependent. The Chicano model compels both "insiders" and "outsiders" of the Trump Wall to redefine an American cultural identity in an evolving and nonfossilized landscape. Further, the location of the US-Mexico border wall or the Trump Wall cannot be more appropriate to revisit of the Mexican-American War (1846–1848) and cannot be more pertinent to an up-close examination of the origin of the cultural wall and war that the nation is engaging in 2018.

As early as in 1987, in her *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa poignantly stated: "The U.S-Mexican border es *una herida abierta* (an open wound) where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds." The current geographical border between the US and Mexico was created and born from the hemorrhage of the Mexican-American War nearly two centuries ago. It is a line of collision and clashing. To the winner, the border is a trophy, a demarcation of newly acquired property, and an institutionalized claim of ownership; to the loser, a dismemberment, a reduction, a wound, and a bleeding scar.

Three decades after Anzaldúa's testimony, President Trump has literally brought border subjects like Anzaldúa back in time on the "great, great" wall, a painful reminder of Mexican lost territory. Trump's threat to ask Mexico to pay the cost represents nothing but a neocolonial humiliation. The Trump Wall reopens the historical wound and cuts with precision the scar fresh and deep, which has been in a healing and regenerating over the almost two centuries. It is done this time with the intent to push Mexicans and other Central Americans to jump off the wall to the other side. Budget Director Mick Mulvaney is doubtful of the purpose of the wall, and speaks out: "This doesn't stop drugs and doesn't stop criminals from crossing the border, in fact it doesn't stop hardly anything from crossing the border." Alice Driver believes that "the Trump's Mexico Wall would be a gift to the drug cartels" and calls it "a throwback to a bygone era." Driver slams Trump's arguments that a wall would stop many of the drugs from pouring into this country and poisoning our youth, and argues,

The tricks of the multibillion-dollar drug business include using drones, submarines, ultralight planes and even frozen sharks to transport product across the US-Mexico border. Just consider that in 2016, US Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations agents attempted to seize a submarine in the Pacific Ocean with nearly \$194 million worth of cocaine. 12

In "Crossing between the Great Wall of China and the 'Great' Trump Wall," I compare Trump with the first Chinese Emperor Qingshi Huang who builds the Great Wall of China to fence off northern "barbarians" and invaders so that the Chinese (the Hans') culture would be "pure," and the commencing emperor would keep the flags on the newly

expanded frontiers of the Empire. 13 Nonetheless, as examined above, the Trump Wall intends to preserve the "purity" of American culture and appeals to the economic and political interests of a significant segment of the population inside the wall. With a horizon blocked and a space confined by the wall, the egocentrism and the ethnocentrism of Trump attempts to make America great again, just like Qingshi Huang whose egocentrism and ethnocentrism attempted to make the newly unified Chinese Empire glorious for the ten-thousand generations to come. The Trump Wall proves nothing but a continuation of the Mexican-American war that cut Mexico apart and took away its territory for the upand-coming American empire's expansionism.

Lacking a sense of the past and with a distorted view on the present, the Trump Wall deters and is detrimental to a growing and evolving American cultural identity. From the racial and cultural hierarchy, Trump has inherited a closed, exclusive, and static framework in dealing with the crisis, the challenges, the possibilities, and the fluidity that pertain to the globalization of the twenty-first century. His wall mentality is not inconsistent with those of the wall-builders in history and particularly in the past a dozen of years. On December 16, 2005, the House of Representatives passed Congressman Duncan Hunter's (R-CA) amendment to the border Protection, Antiterriorism, and Illegal Control Act of 2005. This called for mandatory fencing along 698 miles of the almost 2000-mile border, that is, building "un muro" (a wall) to cut through again the dismembered territories that used to be part of the Mexican body. 14 To deter, cut, and block Mexican and other Central Americans' crossing has become a widely endorsed call, because it has "fittingly" become a synonym for defending American interests and American values in the north of the fencing. Self evidently, the border fencing or the muro/wall building between the two countries intensifies the cultural war. The reinforced fence along the entire US-Mexico border in general, and around the area of the Rio Grande Valley in particular—a major battle ground in the Mexican-American War—is crudely evocative of a historic wound and makes it bleed again. Hunter's amendment does not really have any regard to history. President George W. Bush signed the Secure Fence Act of 2006 on Oct 26, 2006. Subsequently, triple-layered fencing and sometimes a vehicle fence are frequent sights along the border. For more than a decade, ironically, the US lawmakers have been reopening the wound or the scar (in Anzaldúa's term) culturally while doing their jobs to secure the border. Trump is now determined to make this cut even deeper. One can only imagine the pain and hurt that the US administration's approach would have brought to Gloria Anzaldúa if she were still living among us.

On the surface, the Mexican-American War was waged for territory dispute and economic interest. In the wake of the 1845 US annexation of Texas, the armed conflict between the two countries lasted from 1846–1848. President James Polk's (D) expansionism towards the Pacific coast and its military superiority poised the US in a position of a "conquistador." In the meantime, the post-independence instability, political discordance, and unformed economic infrastructures debilitated Mexico militarily and fragmented the already divisive country. Not surprisingly, the two countries ceased fire with the humiliating Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which required that Mexico cede the territories of Alta California and Santa Fe de Nuevo Mexico to the United States. In return, the US agreed to pay "\$15 million compensation" for the war damage and assumed \$3.25 million of debt owed by the Mexican government to US citizens." 15 The boundaries between the two countries were remapped by an invisible but impenetrable wall, erected by the Mexican-American War.

In the depth of cultural life on both sides of the invisible but impenetrable border wall, new demarcations of internal cultural walls were sprouting. On the Mexican side, the war was a dismemberment of an integral body and a national humiliation. The country had to

adjust its chopped body to a new physiological configuration to become a whole again, not unlike the aftermath of the Spanish conquest that wiped out the indigenous populations, languages, religions, and ways of life. Mexico was born from the blood of the clash with the walls imposed by the Spanish empire. Spanish language and Catholicism were two transplanted vital organs that made the Azteca, the Maya, and all other indigenous groups Mexican. The US conquered the neighboring nation again with the Mexican-American War. When the sovereignty is not respected, the cultural identity is shattered, and the way of life is violated, there is going to be a cultural wounding and lamenting. From then on, Mexico acknowledged the loss of Texas, and, thereafter, the Rio Grande as its national border with the US. The Mexicans entered a soul-searching period for their postindependence cultural and national identity. In the face of the military might and economic superiority of the US, should the Mexicans see the US as a new "protector" and "master," or a second colonizer after the Spanish? Are the Mexicans, so divided and so lost, not even able to come up with a self-defined national identity? Who are Mexicans after all? Spanish? Indigenous? Americans? Is it a nation waiting to be told who they are? The Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) was a revealing point where diverse schools of thoughts found themselves in chaotic and violent competition and bloodshed to address these questions. The cultural walls are once again built in the depth of a collective Mexican psyche. They engender both external and inner conflicting versions and interpretations in the process of defining and redefining a nation and its culture—as well individuals who populate that culture and that nation. Mexican Noble laureate Octavio Paz depicts an elusive Mexican identity in The Labyrinth of Solitude, hidden behind the masks of the indigenous and the Spanish for the fear to be crushed by cultural "conquistadors" and colonizers. Then, the renowned Mexican cultural thinker and writer Carlos Fuentes carries on this notion. Fuentes's The Death of Artemio Cruz dissects the intertwined layers of the pre-Columbian, the Spanish, and the Americanization in building a Mexican and a nation's character. Both Paz and Fuentes send out an unequivocal message of the cultural walls due to the colonialization and the neocolonialism in the complex Mexican psyche. In the meantime, both of them fight passionately for a chance to develop an autonomous and standalone Mexican culture in relation to the past and current superpowers who have left undeletable prints and colors south of the Trump Wall.

On the north side of the Rio Grande in the US, the Mexican-American war prompted antiimperialist and anti-slavery waves, mainly led by the Whig Party. It shook up the cultural walls established by the colonists, the Founding Fathers, and the patriots, who had organized the world into the insiders and the outsiders along the American cultural wall(s). The Whig Party and expansionism pushed American racial and cultural hierarchy into a new terrain, broadened and yet more complex than the original founding ground. The Mexican-American war intensified the already bitter debate over the expansion of slavery to the newly acquired land. This culminated in the American Civil War. In a crosscultural mirror, like Mexico, the US also entered a redefinition of national sovereignty and cultural identity. Who is more powerful? England? France? The Atlantic world? Or the emerging power of the US? Within the same existential space, how should the white people relate to the black, and now to the Mexicans who were once colonized by the Spanish? The cultural foundation laid by the Founding Fathers, and the cultural and racial walls erected by slave owners and subsequent colonists had to be remodeled now. The wars fought between the colonized Americans and the colonizer British takes on a new meaning, as the colonized (the white Americans) are now the "colonizer" and the "ruler" in the North American continent. With each demolishing of a wall, there comes a renewed cultural and racial confrontation, resulting in a new war; with each war there comes a new wall and a new erection and exclusion.

Still on the north side, the shift of the Mexico-US border left many Mexican citizens separated from their own government and became aliens in their own land. For the indigenous who had never accepted Mexican/Spanish rules, the change in border meant a second colonization and violation, through and through. These are the subjects doubly lost in multi-layered invasions and impositions. The cultural wars not only created new winners and losers but also an interlaced borderland where walls are in constant realignment to reflect what they encircle. The Mexican-American war erected an invisible wall that demarcates a visible border and a borderland of bilingualism between and within the two nations. Thus, the demarcation is twofold: a geographic line and a cultural line. One is fixed and physical to the naked eye, and one is fluid and psychological in our minds and hearts. The two are in eternal confrontation and negotiation, that is, in an incessant wall-and-war with one another. If a border subject holds onto Mexican heritage, then s/he is deemed as unassimilable by the Anglo; if a border subject holds onto American values, s/he is perceived as a cultural traitor and called a "banana" (brown outside and white inside) by Mexicans. The borderland is prone to cultural walls and cultural wars between groups as well as within an individual's mind and heart.

Contrary to Trump's worldview, the visible and invisible walls on the US-Mexico border can never forcibly sever and cut clean historical, economic, social, ecological, cultural, and linguistic ties between the two sides. Instead of walling "outsiders" out and warring the "pure" American values, a cultural "mestizaje" consciousness à la Anzaldúa needs to be brought to light and cultivated.

Kara Keeling and Josh Kun in their "Introduction: Listening to American Studies" embark on the quest: "What role can sound play in analyzing contemporary debates around empire, immigration, and national culture? Where is sound in the cultural and political legacies of 'American' culture and where is it in the long history of U.S. nation-building?" 16 As it turns out, our search merges with theirs on the other side of the Trump Wall—the outside where "'American' formations of race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, community, and class...has the birth of recorded sound in the late nineteenth century." 17 During that time, in performing arts and music, "the distinct sound of American selfhood . . . was likewise exclusive of African Americans, Native Americans, and women in general." 18 There were visible walls blocking a comprehensive picture of American reality and silencing the voices that are not inside the wall. It is understood that Americans make sound and blacks/Indians make noise. 19 Since the late 1960s civil rights movement, the concerted effort to include diverse voices mounts to "dismantle dominant hierarchies of knowledge production and critical thought." 20 Such an effort has been embraced by "scholars working within postmodernism, cultural studies, postcolonialism, feminism, queer studies, critical race and ethnic studies, and indeed American studies in general."21 These voices continue their audibility "impacting 'American' identities in the age of globalization." 22 We on both sides of the Trump Wall, especially those inside, need "the broad, flapping American ear," as described by Henry David Thoreau, to listen to how the mestizaje consciousness sounds and speaks. 23

In recent years, many scholars and intellectuals have brought themselves into public squares to join the cultural war and fight for what they believe to be true American values. "Over the past two decades a powerful body of work investing concepts of social difference in relation to representation and social power has developed in the US and spread well beyond the academy." 24 In 1996, Jane C. Desmond and Virginia R. Domínguez give distinctive acknowledgment of the Spanish speaking community intertwined with the US history, but kept outside what I have characterized the Trump Wall: "Expanded acknowledgement of the intertwined histories of Latin America and the United States has begun," and it goes in the outside-to-the-inside direction. 25 "The migration of people from

Latin America to the United States, the historical contests over the US border, the theorization of cultural borderlands, and the development of Hispanic population in the United States," all deals with the crossing of a cultural wall at different levels. 26 However, there is a huge distance between what an academic or an intellectual can do in the cultural war and what Trump is doing with his chain of political events.

During the 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump called for the construction of a much larger and fortified wall, estimated at \$8 to \$25 billion to be paid by Mexico. Deeply wounded, the Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto said his country would not pay, and compared Trump's rhetoric to the former dictator of Italy Benito Mussolini. On January 25, 2017, the Trump administration signed a Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements Executive Order 13767. On July 27, 2017, the House voted to approve a spending bill with \$1.6 billion to put toward a wall all along the US-Mexico border, fulfilling a high-profile campaign pledge from Trump. CNN states:

Despite Trump's pledge to make Mexico pay for the wall, the bill earmarks taxpayer money to construct a carrier along the southwest border.... House Republican leaders tucked it into a procedural measure that set the debate plan for the so-called "minibus" funding bill for several federal agencies. The bill passed 235–192 mostly along party lines. 27

Once again, the idea of a wall has been consistent in the US politics since 2005. The consistency lies with a sense of national security and protection. A US-Mexico border wall is intended to protect US political and economic interest, protect the country from terrorism, drug-trafficking, as well as a mechanism to check the flow of illegal immigrants from Mexico and Latin America. The Trump Wall triggers out a series of cultural wars with Mexico and within the US, reminiscent of the cultural debates of anti-imperialism and anti-slavery in the second half of the nineteenth century.

While the federal government is pressing ahead with its plans for the wall, more than 200 companies have reportedly responded to an invitation from the Department of Homeland Security to submit designs for a wall along the US-Mexico border, "nominally 30ft tall, that will meet requirements for aesthetics, anti-climbing, and resistance to tampering or damage." The contest was planned to take place in the summer of 2017 in the border city San Diego. A cursory look of the interested vendors reveals "a can of cultural worms" fighting and competing for a space on the wall, to be held as the American cultural icon. To illustrate the cultural war by the Trump Wall, I have selected a few representative "worms" from James Cook's article for BBC News, "100 Days: What Might Trump's Border Wall Look Like?" Let's distill and interpret the cultural war suggested in his article.

An Illinois firm, Crisis Resolution Security Services, has promised a wall "as pretty as the Parthenon," which signals that Eurocentric culture—with Greek-Latin origin, Anglo-Saxon heritage, and English language—define what America is. 30 Parthenon, icon of Western civilization, is therefore intended to exclude those on the south side of the Trump Wall from the definition of America. It is hoped that the image of Parthenon will be powerful enough to deter any crossers who do not fall into the walled definition, and powerful enough to call upon those who fit that definition to defend their group from the top of the wall. The design ignites a cultural war on what America is and who should get inside the Trump Wall. The cultural war monopolizes the meaning of the West, and reveals cultural ignorance about the influence of the Greek antiquity on the cultural heritage in the Spanish-speaking world. Thus, the cultural war denies the participation of millions of Spanish speakers, as contributors and agents, on both sides of the wall in the American/Western culture. Moreover, if the US is exclusively linked, through the Trump Wall, to a Western classic canon and an Anglo-centricism, then at best, the clock is turned

back to the 1700s, and at worst, the wall echoes and energizes a monolithic alt-right worldview that reminds us of race-based elimination of certain individuals and certain cultures.

Another vendor, California's Concrete Contractors Interstate, suggests an "aesthetically pleasing" wall of polished concrete, embossed on both sides with artwork showcasing "various cultures and communities" along its route. 31 So, the Trump Wall, instead of blocking cultural flow, will be transformed into a multicultural connector and a celebration of an inclusive global world. What a drastic counterstatement against the one of the Illinois firm! The California firm sings a multicultural Kumbaya and sends a message of respect, acceptance, tolerance, and peace. However, can the visual message of peace and harmony overcome the bigotry and the fear that the Trump Wall promulgates? To what degree can this utopic and cohesive picture by the California company be realized in a deeply divided America? All this remains to be seen.

Then, there is a Texan company called PennaGroup of Fort Worth. Its boss Michael Evangelista-Ysasaga is Latino and 80% of his staff are Mexican American. "The PennaGroup throws its hat into the ring in the contest for the best design of the wall."32 Once the word got spread, Michael Evangelista was immediately branded as a cultural traitor, disgraceful to his own people—the Hispanic community. How can someone with a Mexican heritage contribute to the building of the Trump Wall? Subsequently, he has received "at least a dozen death threats" and numerous insulting voice mails on a daily basis, from "his [own] people." 33 In the cultural war, one has to take an exclusive side; there is no middle ground and no tolerance for a fighter like Mr. Evangelista. An American business man who happens to have a Mexican heritage confuses the warring sides and stirs up unprocessed raw hate and distrust. From American side, he is too Mexican and perhaps complicit with illegal immigrants. He will never be able to cross the cultural wall to be a "full American." From Mexican side, he is too gringo and heartless towards his own culture. He will never be able to reach out from the wall to be a "full Mexican." In truth, Mr. Evangelista is disturbed by rumors that rival firms are proposing electrified fences or razor wire. He believes there has to be a humane and non-lethal option in building the wall and he can offer that option. So what cultural position should Mr. Evangelista take in participating in the contest or the cultural war? Should he, or should he not be responding to the invitation by the Homeland Security? Is a black-and-white, neat and orderly cultural war an answer to his dilemma? Can a neatly designed and costly Trump Wall, just approved by the House with a \$1.6 billion spending bill on July 27, 2017, address and answer these fundamental questions that are laid in the depth of a collective psyche?

If a unified delineation is what the Trump Wall intends to accomplish, his wall overshadows an interconnected and flattened landscape, further divides the already unbridgeable cultural spectrums, and polarizes emotional forces that grab headlines on a daily basis in the nation's life. The Trump Wall fuels the sentiment to exclude and kick out. It fosters the fear and bigotry of those who feel that their core values are threatened and their opportunities are taken away by the wall-crossers. So, there are multiple sets of cultural values in twenty-first-century America at work. Far from being cohesive, coherent, and integral, we often find these values competing, confronting, and mutually exclusive. The Trump Wall represents one of them, but intends to make it the only set of American values for everyone to embrace. Thus, the Trump Wall embodies a cultural wall that provokes cultural war(s).

The truth is that Trump era does not invent a divisive and war-inducing wall and Trump is not the first wall builder. The divisive mechanism had always existed since the dawn of human race and since the inception of our nation. The walls, castles, and fortifications have been designed and erected across time, space, and cultures, to include and to

exclude at once. The Trump Wall, in the name of "Make America Great Again," excludes more than includes. More than a brick-and-mortar construction, the Trump Wall is a cultural divide. It extends not only on the border between the US and Mexico, but also on the borders between Christians and Muslims, between immigrants of any origin and those who consider themselves more than anyone else, between the white and the African American, between any races and any creeds, between the heterosexual and the homosexual, between women and men, so on and so forth. A divisive wall-mindset draws an ethno-, culture-, and power-hierarchy, and fuels fear, bigotry, and distrust. It has energized the alt-right movement that advocates white supremacy and entitlement; it rejects a diverse society and a multicultural/multiracial democracy. Trump enables the wall to be more vertical and visible than before, reminding us of an era when democracy and unalienable human rights were only meaningful to certain groups and not to all.

When it comes to American cultural identity, it is abundantly clear that there is not a cultural uniformity but warring cultural voices. American society has been divided into multiple dimensions and spectrums by multiple walls. The contest for the best design for the Trump Wall is in fact a competition of different political and cultural voices. The selection of the ultimate design would be indicative of a major cultural direction that this nation would embark on.

Since Trump became president, there has been an increased level of bigotry, hatred, tension, and violence between groups who define themselves by a variety of "identifiers." These include ideology, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, heritage, sexuality, and ability, each drawing boundaries and erecting fences and walls around to define and defend. We suddenly find ourselves lost in a mine field where "hitting a wall at every turn" takes on a new but twisted meaning. While the "identifiers" can be used to celebrate diversity and "freedom of speech," on the one hand, they are also totally susceptible and exploitable to divisive narratives and practices, capable of being used to generate competition, discrimination, violence, and cultural wars. The Trump Wall builds up not only a border construction between the US-Mexico, but more importantly, raises and restores these cultural and racial walls. If this is how the Trump Wall makes America great again, then we need to question which America he is referring to, and who is in dire need of the Trumpian greatness.

Notes

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♣ Bio



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Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

Missives and Other Un-Notes

Harry Gamboa Jr.

Introduction

"Spanish" was the initial English-language word that was introduced to me during my first day of kindergarten in Boyle Heights in 1955. The bold letters had been painted vertically in a thick blue tempera on the quickly fashioned dunce cap that was unceremoniously placed atop my head by the untethered teacher who believed that such a poorly announced entry into the mid-twentieth century would be an appropriate signifier befitting her interpretation of Mexican American youth. The steep learning curve turned out to be an excellent challenge to level the playing field as I quickly developed my vocabulary and sought out complex subjects that made the local public schools unsuitable for the pace of my development. By the final day of high school in 1969, I was well-versed in playing word games with the political establishment of that era and with the process of motivating my community to adopt the term "Chicano" as the self-defining word that would be expressed to assert a new starting point for enhanced national dialogue.

In 1971, I was marching with many young people in East Los Angeles during a peaceful protest against the politically motivated assassination of journalist Ruben Salazar (a prominent voice on behalf of the Chicano community) who had been shot to death by a police agent. The calm and silence of the protest demonstration was shattered when more than a dozen police officers opened fire with riot shotguns using live ammunition resulting in many fallen and dead. The subsequent reactionary mainstream news reports that fanned the false flames of negative stereotypes against Chicanos and mass arrests that followed along with Marshall Law-like tactics that were enacted created a toxic environment of oppression. The shock that such extreme measures of power would be utilized against American citizens of Mexican descent to counter the increasing social and political awareness of my peers caused me to reflect on my lack of documentary imagery to illustrate what I had witnessed to be an absolute atrocity against a nonviolent group of youth.

In 1972, I co-founded Asco, an art group that would employ various performance, photographic, and text-based projects, and mass media manipulation techniques, to create No Movies, fotonovelas, and to generate cultural myths that would be incorporated and eventually adopted by contemporary scholarship and the international art canon. In the 1980s, I was awarded fellowships by the National Endowment for the Arts and the J. Paul Getty Trust Fund for the Visual Arts for my role in pursuing new genres involving the blending/bending of text/image/concept in works that either defied or extended established forms of expression.

I recently directed nearly a hundred performers from my Virtual Vérité (2005–2017) performance troupe to hopscotch their way across the various crevices and cracks of

systemic breakdown to simulate the shattering effects of societal collapse while playing in the streets. Such performances involve counterintuitive posturing and non-sequential actions that serve as the premise for popup fotonovelas that occupy their rightful position in extending narratives that enter an alternate realm of consciousness. During the twenty-first century, my work has been exhibited in major museums alongside acclaimed artists and sometimes my slightest utterances are taken up as a befitting addition to the international lexicon whenever description, observation, or analysis requiring an unexpected mixture of concept and playfulness to upturn the most reluctant social conventions. It is with respect for tradition as well as anticipation of its demise that I submit "Missives and other Un-notes."

Incoming, Imploding, and Insulting

The pounding on the door wasn't unexpected but the flash grenade that landed in the baby's crib enhanced the rude introduction to extreme ops tactics.

"Baby's on fire. Taze the parent. Cuff the siblings. Shoot the dog."

"ICE cold, blood hot."

"Unit number seven is secure. Take down units nine and fourteen".

The apartment complex is filling with black smoke and orange fumes. Several agents are beating three children with metal rods. A grandfather's skull is being crushed under the lethal weight of a robotic apprehension boot.

"Mother is resisting. Stab."

"Inject them all with opioids and charge them with felonies."

"Targets vanquished. Zero survivors."

"Deportations nullified. Thank you team."

"Confiscate cash and family valuables then demolish the structure."

"Al assessment declares victory."

"Walking tall among the rubble means it is a glorious day."

"We make shadows disappear."

TV Isn't Talking To Me

"Meet The Press, Face The Nation, This Week, generic obfuscation minus deep critical discourse. Mimicry and platforms for individuals and agencies that dance the minuet in subdued goose-step."

"You'll be better off watching cartoon reruns."

"They explain the obvious without any authenticity. The criminals justify their crimes and the explainers wonder out loud how society has been poisoned without using any sweeteners."

"I'll change the channel for you."

There are only three channels on this thing, I refurbished it to channel the 1950s limited experience. Watch and listen."

MTP: The wall is a barrier that furthers soul-searching. Climb that.

FTN: Inhumanity is a word and money is action. Are you a verb or a noun?

TW: The two-party system is flawed but makes a beautiful mirror to reflect on our times.

"Next time, I'll bring a bag of popcorn along."

"The talking heads are ripe for decapitation."

"It'll never happen here. Everyone is on the same page. Talk is cheaper the more it is misinterpreted. Say it loud enough to be forgotten quickly."

"They're looking at me."

"It is a silly illusion."

"Could I be imagining it all?"

"Frame the virtual into total nonexistence."

"But I would like to believe that it is important."

"Close your eyes and count on no one."

Arrogance Par Excellence

All of the uniformed young boys stood at attention. Their youthful enthusiasm was about to be bludgeoned by the bulldozing style of speech and manner of a frightful mouth that bared an endless row white sharp teeth.

"I love followers, especially the kind that can take it in the gut without whimpering to their mommies and daddies. I've come here to demand your respect but most importantly to get you to stop thinking of yourselves as being yourselves. You belong to me. When I was a young boy I knew that one day I'd be the grownup in charge and would lead all of you into a wonderful place that I call the homeland. You belong here but there are those who will never belong. I need you to grow up strong to make sure they never prosper."

The campfire was burning white hot and threatened to surpass all containment efforts to prevent critical mass and meltdown.

"There has never been a time more important than today. You will sacrifice your will in exchange for safety, luxuries, and a world where no one looks any different than ourselves. You will be so happy that you were born to be who you are and not anyone else. Privilege is a right."

Marshmallows placed on the sharpened tips of titanium skewers were handed out to each of the boys as they all sang in unison to a vintage drumbeat machine:

Decimate the invading hordes

Dissolve whatever they might have thought

To be their birthright

Don't delegate the killing to your brothers and sisters

What might be liquidated today

By your own hand

By your own gun

Outrun the chaos to stop it in its tracks

Seize the tongue of the outspoken

Blind those who see falsely

An eye for an eye for an eye

I pledge to thee

The tempo picks up autonomous speed as a thousand marshmallows are plunged into the brilliant flames:

Eliminate the difference

By whatever force

The drug of choice is power

Don't hesitate the killing of your natural enemy

They would take from you what is not theirs to keep

Stab the hand that would steal

Your precious freedom

Storm their places of refuge

Set them alight with firebombs

They were not meant to be in our world

Sing so that they might hear and fear your voice

Let them tremble before your righteous sword.

The many marshmallows are toasted and the aroma of sweetness with a hint of vanilla is in the air.

"That's some fine singing boys. I'm so proud of you. Now enjoy your camping experience and so happy to have stoked your interest in achieving purity of purpose."

The fire crackled with an ominous intensity as the arrogant figure disappeared behind a cadre of heavily armed security personnel that tossed fragrant flowers onto the ground as the retreated into a waiting helicopter. The rotor blades swept up massive volumes of air and quickly ascended into the night sky until it vanished without a trace among the stars and void of awareness.

Listless In The Waiting Room

The man had been instructed to surrender his identity documents along with whatever worldly possessions he had been carrying with him and to remove his clothing before being allowed to step into the waiting room. He complied meekly but was very ashamed of his own body as it was by far the most imperfect physical mass of human form as far as he could imagine, especially when compared to the beautifully alluring creatures that he

had seen walking past him on the streets and along various misguided avenues that led him directly to the abject position of being a powerless subject for an experimental human trial involving volatile drugs and dangerous devices. He was quite certain that others would be absolutely disgusted to see him in such shape. He had already completely resigned himself to this lowest social role when he walked through the open door into vast empty waiting room. There were no chairs, stools, benches, sofas, or boxes that he could sit on so he stood silently and perfectly still in the middle of the room and waited for what could have been minutes or many hours.

An unfamiliar amplified voice spoke through several large speakers.

"Subject Number Six, please be so kind as to raise your arms and open your mouth wide while inhaling and exhaling. This shouldn't cause you too much discomfort but we will need to arrive at a baseline before proceeding with the experiment."

The man opened his mouth but found it difficult to breathe as though the air were being drawn out of him. It occurred to him that he might indeed suffocate before the experiment would begin in earnest. He had never noticed how heavy his arms were as it was a stain to lift them above his head. He wondered why the right arm seemed to be so elongated while the left arm had become a shriveled stump of an appendage. The shock of realizing that a few fingers were missing made the experience somewhat frightening and absurd.

"Try not to think about the present as you will be asked to perform several tasks that will require you to utilize learned behaviors from past events."

Two assistants dressed in white jumpsuits with white rubber aprons approached the man from behind and caught him off guard, causing him to become startled for a moment.

"These anatomically enhanced robots will be touching your body in intimate ways. They are are capable of interpreting your Alpha waves. They will do everything to initiate sexual arousal even though they are made of plastic, wires, glass, and a few odd trace metals. Their personality and intelligence is based on vaguely understood algorithms and their own self generating Al language."

The two robots kiss the man while he attempts to fondle their nonexistent genitalia. He senses that they might be real humans but the hardness of their inhuman glare penetrates deep into his unconscious to strike fear and mental paralysis while causing him to become erect and reckless. They have been toying with him while introducing highly addictive psychotropic drugs into his body via ultra fine needles that penetrate his skin with each and every touch.

The ultra pretty robot is still in beta format and is subject to command reversal while the maximum sexy robot is fully functional and has the capacity to outlearn its creators.

"We, we, weeeee, like you. It is ultimate pleasure to die? What you say of revolutionary chemical compounds. Let's get high."

The man recognized the face and voice of the robot but found it to be nearly impossible to believe that his long-dead girlfriend would somehow be digitized to such perfection.

"I like like to see inside your mind too. Music makes air hurt. I will put my hand here to cure the illness of the unexpected ego failure."

The man soon found himself in a strangely unfamiliar autoerotic relationship with two machines and an unseen voyeur. He could feel his consciousness expanding beyond all previous realms of his awareness. He was at once knowledgable about all things while

unable to articulate the simplest ideas. Time was dripping and tactile information became the primary source of knowing what would be unknowable under normal circumstances.

"Thank you for your participation. Surgical procedures were a huge success and have assisted in moving the study forward. Your participation in this trial has come to an end. You will receive payment via electronic deposit. Please see the pharmacist on the way out."

The man had lost all sense of time and wondered how he had become fully dressed. He found himself coming to full consciousness in an elevator that was heading down to the ground floor but was not sure what had just taken place. He was slightly dizzy and had a dull pain in the back of his head and his groin. He was covered in bandages. He could see his reflection in the polished mirrored interior of the elevator and realized that he was completely bruised with numerous stitches holding his flesh together where obvious acts of trauma had taken place. The elevator seemed to going down many miles into the crust of the earth. Other people were crammed in tightly and he could smell their body odors. Even though his tongue was bleeding, he was tempted to lick them all but knew that his days of random experimentation were over. The elevator finally stopped and he exited at the ground floor to arrive at another waiting room where he was instructed to take a number and to sit down on a chair that was placed on one of the many hundred rows of chairs.

There were many warning signs posted on the walls and on the back of chairs:

REMAIN IN YOUR SEAT OR LOSE YOUR PLACE

ANY ACT OF HOSTILITY WILL BE MET WITH OVERWHELMING FORCE

DO NOT TOUCH ANYONE: SUPER-INFECTIONS ARE OMNIPRESENT

THE PHARMACIST IS NOT YOUR FRIEND

SECURITY HAS THE RIGHT TO SEARCH YOU

FOLLOW ALL VERBAL AND WRITTEN DIRECTIONS

Many people had already been called, served, and dismissed while the man sat listlessly in his chair for many hours past nightfall. The dull pain had become more defined as a sharply agonizing rupture causing him to moan uncontrollably.

"You will have to keep quiet or you will be thrown out. Others are in worse condition so you shouldn't be acting like you deserve more attention because the opposite will take place soon."

The security guard was armed with multiple lethal and non lethal weapons. The extendible metal baton was already in his black-gloved right hand.

"Don't make me shut you up."

The man silenced himself despite the intense pain and burning fever that was making him feel somewhat delirious and weak.

The guard walked away slowly as he eyed other potential rule breakers.

"Number one thousand four hundred and fifty-two is called. Please approach the window."

The man got up with great difficulty and staggered to the window where a video screen was set up to engage him in the transaction. The man's identity number and information pertaining to the prescription appeared on the screen.

"One moment. Lift your chin and look at the red dot on the screen."

The man complied with the recorded voice command and a bright light burst was coupled with the taking of his photograph that instantly appeared on the screen.

"Your are to take one pill every three hours for the next ten days. Do not deviate from this regimen so that all will be fine by day eleven. If you suffer any excessive bleeding, stroke, or death, please discontinue use. The cost of this medication is being electronically deducted from your account. Your receipt has been emailed and texted to you. Thank you."

The man walked out the door and onto the sidewalk where he then put the first pill into his mouth. He swallowed it quickly and within a few minutes he felt an incredible sensuous pleasure that went beyond any dream state he had ever known. His eyes became glazed and he was speechless. He wandered about the city throughout the night while the sky became darker as dawn was approaching. He lost all need for self reference and imagined that he was melting into the urbanscape. He was no longer alone. His footsteps retraced the flattening pathway of the many chemically induced zombie-like others who had joined in on the doomed parade while aimlessly traversing the city with an unfixed gaze and hopeless trajectory towards a sunless life of eternal addiction.

Official Reaction

"Please switch your devices to the off position, check in your weapons at the desk, place these personal radiation detectors to the lapels of your shirts and blouses, and stand in orderly file until we are given the go-ahead to enter the briefing room. You'll notice that the green light will turn on when the decompression chamber has completed its task. If there are no questions then prepare to listen because no questions, statements, noises of any kind, no hand gestures, stomping of feet, or any motion that might be considered a threat will be allowed. You are fortunate to be given the opportunity to hear the official reaction to what has just taken place. The spokesperson should be here momentarily."

Nearly fifty VIP journalists are at the front of the line followed by more than one hundred leading thinkers and doers. A hushed silence fills the space with dread as ten super intelligent chimera children walk through the door without first standing in line. It is the first experience for many of those present to see the living results of what many refer to as "designer kids." Their mixture of human, animal, plant, and synthetic DNA structures is based on the engineering fetes of acclaimed geneticists and rogue scientists. One of the children was readily identifiable as being the most intelligent being on earth while the others were rumored to possess other capabilities not usually associated with the human species. Some of the children appeared to literally glow while others left nauseating scents in their wake. Many of those in line felt that their innermost thoughts had been breeched while others believed that they had been violated in some way simply by being in the presence of such impressive mutants.

"The green light is flashing; please enter the room in a calm fashion. Headphones are available for any of you who might not be fully conversant in the English language."

The chimera children are standing on stage flanking the official spokesperson who has entered the room through a secret door. The guests move quickly to find their seats and remain standing until everyone is in place.

"Please sit down. This will only take a few minutes. We will be brief."

Two of the chimera children are holding a powdery yellow substance in their hands and start to consume the material in a way that any child would eat a scoop of ice cream.

"Welcome, everyone. As you know, catastrophes have their good and bad features. The recent limited nuclear exchange cost their side more than thirty million lives while our side suffered only ten million lives. With the current global birthrates that total should be recaptured within a short time. The primary concern involves nuclear fallout and the clustering of plutonium. We are all cognizant of the fact that it is generally referred to as nuclear waste but we are a nation that abhors waste. Why not put the stuff to good use? It is also referred to as yellow cake. I like chocolate cake and many of you must like birthday cake and so and so forth. You will notice that your radiation monitors are registering dangerous levels of gamma rays but soon you will see that the lethal threat will dissipate until we are back to normal ambient radiation readings."

One chimera child has already consumed the handful of yellow cake while the other is savoring the moment and eating more slowly.

We have instituted a new national program to reconstruct the DNA structure of every newborn and school-aged child so that they can successfully compete in a post-nuclear conflict world. It is sort of a free lunch program where each child will be expected to consume plutonium according to a certain percentage of their body weight. Some schools will offer grades while others will participate in other rewards programs to encourage the transformed youngsters to eat like their lives depended on it. Parents will be given some online instruction on how to cope with physical transformations such as the growing of horns, gils, hooves, scales, tentacles, tree bark, calcium-based shells, and other obvious signs of chimera activity. The national effort will eventually be expanded to include all teens and adults. Several States have opted for species purity laws and they will be severely sanctioned by the withholding of federal funds and quite possibly mass deaths due to radiation poisoning. Our scientific team has inserted radiation-adaptive happiness genes into these chimera children so that they might never know sadness, rejection, boredom, and most importantly, rebellion will be an unknown foreign behavior that will be linked only to the distant past. We will eventually do away with all agricultural and ranching subsidies as plutonium will become the primary food source for our country. Starvation will finally be eliminated. We have enough plutonium to feed millions for many thousands of years to come. I am so happy to bring this positive news to you all so that you can share with your readers, viewers, and listeners. Peace be with you."

The plutonium has been completely consumed and some of the other chimera children are showing signs that they are getting hungry. Some of the chimera children reveal their wings and fly around the room like canaries.

"We want more cake."

"Dessert is my favorite."

The spokesperson exits through another door and everyone else is excited by the prospect of eliminating the threat of nuclear fallout. Some of the individuals who were standing near the stage are exhibiting symptoms of severe radiation exposure and are led out behind a black lead curtain.

"I can hardly wait to eat some. It must taste like the ultimate angel food cake."

The VIP's and others left the briefing room in an optimistic mood and most had already forgotten about the mass fatalities that took place only a few days earlier.

"Chocolate cake with red wine. A wonderful diet.

Bloody Eyes

"My father and grandfather went blind around the same age as I am know. I've seen so much in my life. Wonderfully beautiful moments like when my son was born and then later the birth of my daughter. I once saw a lizard's tail wiggling on the floor while I thought of a miraculous painting. I've seen things fall and break into a billion pieces. I was always trapped inside of my own visual world. I've also seen a thousand police bullets fly past me. I could see the hot projectiles moving in slow motion so I was able to avoid being hit whiles others were being massacred on the streets. I witnessed great tragedies involving violence, injustice, death, poor fashion combinations, architectural eyesores, phony interactions, and the visible emotional injuries of others. I've read several million words printed on many thousands of pages. I grew up watching TV but never realized that the physics of the medium never actually produces an image on the screen. It only etches a pathway in my brain to trick me into thinking that I've actually seen something. It is a very effective technique because everyone else believes that we are seeing the same thing. It is nothing but a way to ruin our use of limited time. My eyes are bleeding and my tears flow red."

"Please, stop talking. Reserve your strength. You've just been attacked by a mob of fascists. Pretend to be dead."

"I used to look in the mirror when I was a young boy. I was so pretty and happy but couldn't make up my mind what I was going to do about it for a long time. I wore fake eyelashes during my teens. I wore the coolest dark glasses in my thirties. I studied everyone and realized what it would take to survive under such harsh circumstances. I grew up laughing because I noticed the minute physical and social details that seemed to be the connecting points to how things were made or how systems functioned. I've always known how to pull a single brick from a building to make it collapse. One look and I would always comprehend how to break in or break out of any structure. I've talked my way out of handcuffs on several occasions because I saw the combination of the mental keys that it would take to set me free. But now, everything is blurring."

"You have several lacerations and other wounds. I've stuffed my shirt into the area where you are bleeding most profusely in hope of saving your life. I'd like to stay but I'm afraid that the thugs will return to kill the rest of us."

"You are so kind. I'm having trouble seeing you clearly. So strange, I don't feel any pain.

"There is nothing wrong with your eyes."

"I once saw a man drown another man using a neighbor's water hose that he jammed down his throat. The assailant's wife and children were cheering him on. Some of the other neighbors were drinking beer and having a fabulous time. It was a disgusting display of pure brutality. The man drowned on the lawn. Everyone pitched in to push the dead man off the property and onto the asphalt covered street. His body remained there until it was completely decomposed at which point the dogs and coyotes snatched his bones until nothing was left to mark his murder. Many years later when I was a young man I found myself dancing closely with a fabulous girl. It was his daughter, and she was bent on revenge. I gave her my tactical knife and she ran out of the dancehall to extract justice on her own terms. She had a soft voice that continues to echo in my dreams."

"I looked into the mirror this morning and my eyes were filled with blood. I blame it on excessive alcohol consumption or other imagined illnesses. My eyes are tired. I've stared into the eyes of the most beautiful people. I've transfixed death. I can see that the approaching rioters are filled with hate. I can see that they want to take my eyes out. Let them make me blind and I will lead them into the shadows from where they will never return."

Follow The Moneyed

Towards the end of the previous century, a well known multinational bank developed a plan to hire the most talented and gifted strategists for a particular project that would strengthen their corporate power and global influence. It began more than fifty years ago when the federal government contracted the bank to oversee all funds involved in operating a guest worker program to harvest crops and other seasonal manual labor duties. The bank's immediate misappropriation and outright theft of those funds left all of the nearly one million guest workers shortchanged and destitute after having worked under dangerously oppressive conditions that caused them to be poisoned by herbicides and pesticides. Whenever a guest worker showed the slightest hint of resentment or any symptom of being ill they would be summarily deported to their home countries without being paid their full wages. Guest workers who were not performing at maximum efficiency were given daily doses of stimulants that often extended their work day by reducing needed sleep time. The abusive actions along with compounded thefts resulted in a massive accumulation of funds that was used by the bank to underwrite diverse investments in weapons systems, information systems, and incredible multi-figure bonuses to upper management and cash payoffs to selected regulators. The exponential growth of the fund was managed by offshore consultants who used some of the monies to locate, educate, and train some of the brightest minds from all fifty states in the art of corporate banking. The recipients of such assistance would become highly paid indentured servants on behalf of corporate behemoths. Within the past few years, these brilliant young people have become professionalized to be merged with seasoned corporate veterans to create an incredibly deceptive scheme that would rake all profits from every single checking and savings account without any governmental or international banking system oversight. The genius would lie in its simplicity. The bank would make duplicate shadow accounts for every individual who entrusted the bank with their earnings, retirement funds, inheritance checks, and all other forms of hard currency. The duplicate accounts would utilize the pilfered funds for various unsecured loans and other high risk investments. The original accounts would appear to be untouched while earning profits without any of activities ever being revealed to the account holders. The trillion dollar profit making machine worked wonderfully while robbing anyone who didn't put the money in a sock or tin can for safe keeping. All of the money existed as virtual currency without any bills being printed or any coins being minted. The money was situated on encrypted private servers while being completely inaccessible to anyone who would could count on having the bank being honest with the naive public. The bank reached a point where it affected the value of currency-markets throughout the world and any fluctuation could cause a tsunami of unbearable losses or to create unbelievable windfalls for those who would be fortunate enough to stumble into oceans of free money.

One day, during the second decade of the current century, a cheerful young girl was laughing while counting the number of times that she could jump rope. She had never been noted by her teachers for being an exceptional student in kindergarten or even in her present third grade set of classes. She enjoyed reading a small book that had been

entrusted to her by her imprisoned grandfather who recognized her brilliant mind and determined attitude. Her stated worst subject was math.

"One, zero, one, one, one, zero, one, zero, zero

She jumped rope and counted from afternoon until late evening, then her mother called out to her so that she could eat her supper and make ready to go to bed. The junk food dinner was uninspiring and uneventful. She skipped her homework, watched an hour of vapid television, and then went to bed without stirring; she fell asleep quickly. She slid into an impressive REM stage where intricate dreams carved out a beautiful complex city made up of fully articulated architecture that was contradictory to all known forms of physics and rules of art. When she awoke in the early morning, an idea formed that was difficult to overcome. She switched on her computer and logged onto the internet. She typed a few keystrokes and easily found herself beyond the many security walls that had previously protected unregistered servers and within a few minutes of typing found herself shedding light on what many call the Dark Web. A few more strokes and she caused a fantastic gold castle on the computer screen to collapse in ruin. The immense fortune that was hidden inside of it burst into flames and burned white hot until everything was transformed into digital ash. She logged off then went back to sleep where she would remain in a comatose state until she was revived two weeks later after having undergone a series of mandated electroshock and chemical procedures. When she opened her eyes, she was hooked up to many medical devices and was surround by armed soldiers. Both of her parents were sitting next to her showing signs of having been severely beaten and tortured. All of her father's teeth had been knocked out and her emaciated mother's nose was broken and pushed down to one side.

"Mother, Father, who hurt you? Why am I here? What's happened?"

A man in an expensive silk suit approached her.

"Honey, do you remember what you typed into your computer before your logged off? For some reason, the hard drive erased itself and all of the steps of your mischief have been mysteriously removed from the internet."

"Who are you? I'm thirsty."

The girl stared blankly towards the wall.

"Dear sweet thing, we will put you into a boiling pot of napalm if you don't come clean."

"What? Are you my uncle?"

"Ask your mother what this is all about."

"Mother?"

"Sweetheart, you stole nearly a quadrillion dollars then made it all vanish. Ninety-three thousand people have committed suicide and eight million people have been murdered worldwide all because you decide to play instead of studying like a good little girl.

"You are terrorist. You will be put to death if you don't make the money reappear."

The girl smiled weakly and lifted her hand.

"Please lend me your computer and I will fix it."

A soldier handed her an expensive laptop then pointed a loaded assault rifle at her head."

The young girl typed furiously while she sang along to a furious beat.

"One, zero, one, one, one, zero, one, zero, zero

The young girl stopped typing and handed the computer back to the man in the gray suit.

"All done?"

"Yes, capitalism is dead. I just now killed it."

Several lethal bullets were fired into the girl's skull and both of her parents were shot several times in the back before the man in the gray suit and all of the soldiers on scene slit their own throats due to a impromptu bout of terminal insolvency. The reverberating economic catastrophe that resulted from the young girl's superior hacking assault produced a wave of financial despair that ruined markets all across the globe. Trillions of existing dollars were suddenly worth less than a single penny. Social media played a major role in distributing simplified design drawings of makeshift gallows, guillotines, and portable gas chambers that would be used by those who had lost their life savings to execute many corporate bankers, speculators, insurance brokers, and other suspects who might had been complicit in theft, blackmail, environmental pollution, extrajudicial torture, and numerous other crimes against humanity. Numerous political leaders and their entire family lines were assassinated. Two prominent loathsome loudmouthed heads of state accidentally blew themselves up when they tried to use a boobytrapped ATM in the presidential palace while attempting to cash a joint ten-figure bearer bond as payment for their hastily concluded venture to to sell nuclear assets before the bottom would fall out of the WMD market. Neighbors turned against neighbors. Many motorists mowed down scores of pedestrians while driving their cars, trucks, or buses. Cities burned and chaos reigned across formerly affluent neighborhoods, leaving many to wonder if it would ever be possible to return to feigned civility. Directed violence and mayhem against innocent victims in many developed countries continued as an unfunny harsh game of chance for many years until all imagined and real debts were finally settled and everyone could declare with confidence that they were solidly in the black.

Post-Eclipse Cadre

(Photos by author.)



The cadre moved into action during the few moments of darkness. Layers of the atmosphere were burned away and replaced with glittering ions as the lingering shadows struck fear into the masses.



A perpetual afterimage of the devouring shadow that blotted out the sun allowed for the formulation of a plan to topple the established order of beliefs and behaviors.



The people had been lulled into a lingering slumber while their lifelines were rerouted to enrich the very few.

A midday dawn was approaching.



Individuals would have to assert their place on earth via collective action.

Swift reprisals were in store for those who were lax in their precision to affect change.



Elegance in efficiency would be all the rage as weapons fire could be heard in

the distance. Playful counterbalance would defy the repressive regime.



Strategic cover from intrusive surveillance and direct assault is an important aspect of survival in a posteclipse society.



Focused efforts to confront and repel the immutable power structures must be enhanced by symbolic rituals that will encourage others to join in the struggle for freedom and justice.

Performers

Carolina Maki Kitagawa, MFA, is a sculptor who has exhibited her multimedia works at various venues in the US and Mexico. She was a member of *Virtual Vérité* and appears in numerous fotonovelas including *See What You Mean* series for J. Paul Getty Museum.

Francesco X. Siqueiros, MFA, is a master printer and is the proprietor of El Nopal Press, a publisher of fine art lithographs. His works have been exhibited throughout Europe, Mexico, and Latina America. He was a member of *Virtual Vérité* and appears in numerous fotonovelas including *See What You Mean* series for J. Paul Getty Museum.

Samantha Cline, BA, is a writer and participated in the mass hopscotching across the J. Paul Getty Museum courtyard.

Stephanie Rose Guerrero, BFA, is a painter who has exhibited her works in Los Angeles and Mexico City. She was a member of *Virtual Vérité* and appears in numerous fotonovelas including *See What You Mean* series for J. Paul Getty Museum.

Danny Escalante, MFA, is a installation and performance artist who oftentimes attends major cultural events dressed in costume as identifiable/popular Latino stereotypes. He was a member of *Virtual Vérité* and appears in numerous fotonovelas including *See What You Mean* series for J. Paul Getty Museum.

Daniel Centofanti, MFA, is a photographer who has traversed the urban environment of

Los Angles without fear or loathing. He was a member of *Virtual Vérité* and appears in numerous fotonovelas including *See What You Mean* series for J. Paul Getty Museum.

å Bio



Harry Gamboa Jr.

Virtual Vérité (2005-2017), international performance troupe; Founder. Asco (1972-1985), the East L.A.-based conceptual art group; Co-Founder Exhibitions: Marlborough Contemporary NY, Los Angeles Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art (New York), Tate Liverpool, Centre Pompidou (Paris), Museo deBells Artes (México City), Statens Museum of Kunst (Copenhagen), and other museums. Publications: The New Yorker, Flash Art, Artforum, Art in America, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Le Monde, Frieze, The Art Newspaper, Los Angeles Times, Pfeil Magazine, and Rolling Stone (Italy). Fotonovelas: See What You Mean, J. Paul Getty Museum, 2017. Author: Urban Exile:Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa Jr., 1998. Faculty member of the Photo/Media Program at California Institute of the Arts. (Photo Credit: Barbie Gamboa)



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Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

#eatthatwall

Carmen C. Wong

Introduction

"In a world of uncertainty and confusion, a wall is something to rely on; something standing right there, in front of you—massive, firm, reassuring." 1

It is not without a little parody that I lay one tiny rice brick atop another, buttering on its sides a mortar of a paste made of refried bean. This continues brick by brick until over a thousand of them form a construction that snakes down the two front halls of Rhizome DC, an unpretentious, welcoming community art space fostering "art, learning, DIY culture" and "a home for non-mainstream (arts) programming." My performance-installation sketch, #eatthatwall (working title), was one of several guest features for the opening of Natural Order, a mixed media exhibition by Costa-Rican/Mexican artist Paulina Velázquez Solís that abstracts the "deliriousness of (the human) mammalian."

This gutsy and humorous exhibition, and an artspace that geographically hugs the DC-Maryland border, made for the perfect venue to test out #eatthatwall. The project is an experiment with dissensus through mimicry, using food as an everyday, polysemic object to mock and disempower a structure that has become shorthand for Trump's hardline on immigration. Guests of this exhibit were invited to participate in the construction and eating of the wall, and several did so. Delighted munching and finger-licking among the younger set soon waned to boredom from repetition. The adults, many regulars to Rhizome DC's events, stayed on task only a little longer, gingerly tasting bricks and mortar, and chatting about this strange amalgamation of fabulist symbols between food and the border wall. Our conversations would circulate around the threats and promises encapsulated by the wall, deciphering who would want the wall's existence and why, and imagining what other of our collective fears a wall might protect us from.

Philosopher Costica Bradatan poetically captures the socio-psychology of the wall in an essay in the *New York Times*:

"What a wall satisfies is not so much a material need as a mental one. Walls protect people not from barbarians, but from anxieties and fears, which can often be more terrible than the worst vandals. In this way, they are built not for those who live outside them, threatening as they may be, but for those who dwell within . . . A wall is above all the admission of a fundamental vulnerability." 5

The importance of creative imagination as a counterforce to these anxieties, fears, and vulnerabilities that warrant the need for a wall finds traction in Edward S. Casey and Mary

Watkins's research on art found along separation walls. They observe that "(b)order-wall art portrays marginalized points of view, critiques dominant messages, and not only posits alternate possibilities but creates them . . . art on the wall invites one in and brings one up close, creating an intimacy with the wall . . . Transgressively, the art uses the wall to begin to undo the wall itself." $\underline{\bullet}$

In speculating whether feminist theatre demands feminist mimetic acts, theatre scholar Elin Diamond notes that mimesis might be a tool against "the complex, the different referents we want to see, even as we work to dismantle the mechanisms of patriarchal modeling." #eatthatwall, like the other proposed borders by artists such as Jennifer Meridian, moves beyond using the wall as canvas or art-referenced structure. Collectively these artistic projects enact dissensus through an often humorous mimicry, dismantling the conventions of the border wall by proposing we construct imaginative models of fantastical, brazen, whimsical, or edible walls. The miniature size of #eatthatwall evokes a lightened sense of playfulness, and suitably provides a means to grapple with the massiveness of the actual enterprise of sealing the US-Mexico border. The use of organic, fallible materials shaped into an alternative presentation of rice and beans becomes a vivid means to simultaneously depict and dismantle the imagined efficacy of the wall against border crossers, and simultaneously references the people from both sides who might eat such a sustaining dish.



Figure 1. Wong and assistant Sorane Yamahira adding finishing touches to the wall. (Photo by Sorane Yamahira.)

The materials for the wall were chosen for their simplicity and historical relevance: a hybrid of ingredients with Mesoamerican roots (beans) and a familiar "New World" starch—and one close to my heart—introduced from Asia by the Spanish (rice). Food has been a central medium in my work with performance (beginning with re-stagings of playful, anti-dietetic Futurist banquets in 2009). A bearer of cultural and traditional narratives, and a marker of place and time, food and the rituals around it make for a highly performative signifier, and as Arjun Appadurai remarks, "a peculiarly powerful semiotic device . . . a marvelously plastic kind of collective representation" that derive from our need of it for our survival and its "capacity to mobilize strong emotions." 11



Figure 2. Rice being cooked before pressed, cut, and baked to harden.
(Photo by author.)



Figure 3. Cut bricks of rice baked to harden. (Photo by author.)

has proven a useful material when my work

turned to explore migration, home, and belongings—a case of artistic research imitating nomadic life in a constant search of substitutions and surrogacies around comforts such as food. #eatthatwall could be seen as a continuation of this study of the affective and material nature of food in my recent performances: food co-mingled with inedible materials to produce symbolic relics in <code>Unmade/Untitled</code> (Singapore, 2016); food as a marker of difference between insider/outsider characters who inexplicably share a kitchen in <code>Measures of Elsewhere</code> (New Delhi, 2016) co-created with Bharatanatyam dancer Anusha Ravishankar; or a dish representing the multiple cultures present in a migrant's home in <code>Breakfast Elsewhere</code> (various venues, 2016-present). In these projects, food and food-making are highlighted as sites for the practice of embodied knowledge. A performance of everyday politics ties these food-based choreographies to how we identify, remember, and belong to a place or people.

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Jason De Leon's enlightening research on migrant material culture, for example, has brought a keen eye to the clothing, bags, food, folk-cures, and water stocks that border-crossers carry and consume while making their way across the Arizona desert. This research—into foods with compelling narratives between and across the border, as well as the wall's progress and other responses and protests to its slow manifestation—has spurred a few ideas for new potential materials for construction. One iteration might construct a wall out of discarded or used materials such as food packaging and remnants found on trails used by border crossers, another might examine the agricultural trade between the two countries by building the wall out of materials from potentially embargoed or surplus stocks. 13

Score

Documenting #eatthatwall using the format of a performance score (below) creates a text of the experience of both process and product, and becomes a way to remember how to repeat this protest. The score will challenge me to keep close to the piece's theme and questions as future iterations bring changes to continue to mimic the rise and eventual fall of the wall. For a short video documentation of the resulting construction at RhizomeDC, visit https://youtu.be/MpBz1HhSA_w. Video by Sorane Yamahira. Preservation copy at https://archive.org/details/eatthatwall



(Photo by author.)

1.

Start with measuring

Measure distance.

Measure fear.

Measure scale.

Measure protection.

Measure depth.

Measure separation.

Measure truth justice.

Measure imagination.

Measure poverty.

Measure intentions.

Measure abandonment.

Measure sides but don't take them.

2. Build a wall that'll be a beautiful wall. Scale it to defeat scale.

Shape it like a lego piece, so anyone can help build it, brick by brick. They can lick the mortar off this

edible wall. Use materials that are common, semiotically abundant, meaningful.

Find gaps in existing boundaries to seal with this unscale-able structure: a figment of protection by physical separation.



Above all, welcome all to eat that wall...
(and do whatever happens after, naturally.)



3.

Sift satire from transcripts bearing alternate truth to collage nonsensical free verse, for instance:

Be intangible

intangible, physical, tall, power, beautiful southern border wall Remember that, above and below $\frac{14}{2}$

Way ahead of schedule, way ahead of schedule.

Way, way, way ahead of schedule. 15

Be "physically imposing in height," towering at least 18ft above the border Be impossible to breach with a ladder or grappling hooks and require at least an hour to breach with tools

Be sunk at least 6ft into the ground to prevent tunnelling

Blend in with the "surrounding environment" and be "aesthetically pleasing" from the north side

Include 25ft and 50ft gates for pedestrians and vehicles 16

southern border, lots of sun, lots of heat.

Solar wall, panels, beautiful.

Pretty good imagination right? 17

transparency. You have to be able to see through it. if you have people on the other side of the wall, you don't see them—they hit you on the head with 60 pounds of stuff?

It's over.

As cray as that sounds, you need transparency through that wall. 18

Acknowledgements

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♣ Bio



Carmen C. Wong

Carmen C. Wong is a curiously hungry nomad, performance-maker and practice-based PhD candidate at the University of Warwick with the School of Theatre and Performance Studies. Her research explores ecologies and sites of belonging within places of food-making, everyday cooking choreographies, and food micro-ethnologies, occasionally expressed through participatory performances. Her dialogical method of working employs embodied listening practices and utilizes food as plastic, sensory and affective material with the ability to hold personal mythologies, and social-political metaphors. Her gastro-performance series, evolved since 2009 has propagated a body of projects that examine interactions by, with, and around food and its eaters. She is interested in exploring through her pedagogy and practice, the slippery concept of food authenticity, food-art practice as social sculpture, and expanded sensory experiences in the everyday.



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Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

Rage Grief Comfort &

Spatula&Barcode

Actions

In December 2016 a major city building in Madison, Wisconsin was closed for renovation, and enterprising curators installed a massive temporary art exhibition, titled $\underline{\textit{Municipal}}$. As the community was in the midst of processing the heartbreaking and horrifying election results, we created Rage Grief Comfort & with the explicit aim of moving participants through and past their immediate emotions.



Photo by Clark Peterson

1. Participants were invited to throw a ripe tomato against a plastic-covered wall labeled "rage."



Photo by Clark Peterson

This required that we first ripen several hundred (out of season) tomatoes. This was the scene in our dining room for two weeks leading up to the show.

It turns out that this is actually a very difficult gesture to photograph. Here are some images that do not do justice to the carnival sque scene, the satisfying thud, or the messy residue.





2. At a nearby table, we sliced onions together to bring out our grief.



Photo by Clark Peterson

3. Then we peeled, cooked, and mashed potatoes to make a classic comfort food.



Photo by Clark Peterson

4. To us, the fourth element was the most crucial: as they left, we gave each participant a sugar cookie baked in the shape of an ampersand, and invited them to think about what engagement and activism would come after their emotions and their comfort.



Photo by Clark Peterson



Photo by Clark Peterson

Hundreds of participants threw tomatoes and accepted cookies. We gathered the tomatoes to make "simmering rage" and fed all the food to the artists and volunteers as they de-installed the show.



Photo by Clark Peterson

Reflections

As the arts collective $\underline{Spatula\&Barcode}$, we produced $Rage\ Grief\ Comfort\ \&\$ in response to what we saw as our communities' need both to feel intensely the emotions in our title and to recognize and act on realities beyond and behind those feelings.

We've been making art as Spatula&Barcode for ten years and in that time created dozens of projects. What started off as a fun and decidedly light-hearted exploration of sociality and conversation has expanded to include works commissioned to affect specific communities and works designed by us to explore our own concerns. Past projects have investigated travel, tourism, climate, urban space, academic time, and, most recently, "Foodways" in locations in Germany, Australia, and the United States. While much of our solo work is "political," and our collaborative work has always merged criticality with hospitality and pursued what we hope is a pro-social and communitarian "slow" politics, Rage Grief Comfort & was our first work to make (implicit) reference to an immediate, "capital P" political situation.

Three themes emerged in our reflections on *Rage Grief Comfort &*: affect, waste, and generosity.

While our experience with $Rage\ Grief\ Comfort\ \&\$ left us convinced of the value of affective, and even "deflective" artworks, we also realized that feelings of shock and outrage are limited in their political impact. There were no direct references to the regime change in our project, but almost every participant chuckled knowingly or made a topical comment as they took up a tomato. While clearly an explicit contextualization was unnecessary for the piece to "work," we also felt we wanted our space, in this repurposed public building, to be in some way apart from the noise of political media. In this sense, for us it was "not a Trump issue."

The sense of rage that we felt from many directions was almost inchoate, and while we didn't conceive of the work as explicitly therapeutic, we did conceive of it as a "working through" of affective experience that could otherwise be counterproductive. One of our private slogans for the work was "feel what you're feeling, decide what you're doing." Nonetheless, we were taken aback at the violent satisfaction that some took in enacting the first gesture of the piece—and some of those folks didn't bother to move through our other "stages." As the day wore on, we became more insistent about pursuing the conversation around the meaning of the cookies; we felt it important to insist that at least *contemplating* action needed to follow on indulging in affect.

The ampersand is a part of our group identity and semi-ironic brand. In this project, we think of this ampersand as a reference to all the other work we are all already doing, making commitments to do, and will have to do when our needs for social justice cannot be realized through existing institutions. Like many of our participants, we experience our national and global politics as in many ways "broken," and as constructed in the first place to serve narrow, elite interests. While we can't ignore existing systems (to the contrary, we must pressure them more intensely), the ampersand signifies to us both the common (and futile) expectation that self-righteousness be rewarded (as in the "you deserve a cookie" meme) and as a literal reminder of the work that comes after this particular moment of pleasure and togetherness. The ampersand indicates that the cookie is not enough.

Another facet of the Municipal show that surprised us was participants' concern that the tomatoes might be "wasted." It's not only that Michael was positioned in the midst of our project processing tomatoes into sauce, boiling and mashing potatoes, and caramelizing onions, nor the fact that we as a collective are known for feeding our audiences. Rather,

it's the fact that no one questioned any other resource expenditures of this (or as far as we know) any other project in the show. From other work we've done, we're well aware that food waste is a unique issue that brings out anxiety, guilt, and righteousness. Moreover, we're well aware that artmaking itself is often considered wasteful expenditure and that the confluence of art and food is particularly vulnerable to such critiques. However, we think it's a mistake to unquestioningly bow to critiques of "waste" or assumptions that food waste in particular is either especially problematic or especially easy to remedy. In fact, one thread of our recent Foodways projects focused on developing a more nuanced and systems-based understanding of waste.

Finally, we want to contemplate the generosity and hospitality that underwrite this and all of Spatula&Barcode's projects. Participants often thank us for our work; they experience it as a gift, and *Rage Grief Comfort &* was about giving experience, space, conversation, and a cookie. Volunteers gave freely of their time and both physical and emotional effort as well. It was the context of the show, "Municipal" that threw into relief the elements of gratuity and generosity that some feel can be found in all cultural production (our touchstone for these ideas has long been Lewis Hyde's influential book *The Gift*). The whole experience was infused with acts of free and even purposeless giving, involving the city, the community, the organizers, the artists.

Afterlife

Explorations of the political potential of generosity are at the heart of our next phase of our projects, both scholarly and creative. For example, we are editing a volume of the journal of *Performance Research* on the theme "On Generosity." We believe that pursuing diverse aims that might be seen as involving generosity (from welcoming refugees into our communities to cancelling student loans and other forms of debt) is central to refusing the neoliberal politics of the 45th U.S. presidency, just as it will be in our responses to the impact of our rapidly changing climate and our rapidly deteriorating social safety net. We hope that the *Rage Grief Comfort &* project serves to model—and reward—generosity.

One of the most satisfying parts of creating *Rage Grief Comfort &* has been its recurrence in new contexts. The project has been taken up by others and restaged in the open source format for which it was intended. It's circulating now as part of a project by the Boston-based <u>Design Studio for Social Innovation</u> (DS4SI) in their <u>Social Emergency Response</u> <u>Center</u> (SERC) kit. According to DS4SI:

SERCs are temporary, emergent, and creative pop-up spaces co-led by activists and artists around the US. They function as both an artistic gesture and a practical solution. As such, they aim to find the balance between the two, answering questions like: How will we feed people—and their hunger for justice? How will we create a shelter—where it's safe to bring your whole damn self? What will reconstruction—of civil society—look like?

This project by DS4SI was actually in the works before the election, but the concept of a Social Emergency Response Center took on new meanings on November 8, 2017. But as activist Kenneth Bailey (and many others) point out, "The social emergency was already here." The SERC is a rich and complex response to ongoing societal inequities and we are honored to be able to include this poster as part of the kit that is sent out to participants:

rage grief comfort



Rage

Cover a wall with plastic sheeting, draped into clean containers. Give each participant a ripe tomato to throw. Collect and cook gently to make "simmering rage."

Comfort

Ask folks to help peel and cut potatos. Boil, mash, and serve with onions and/or gravy for a basic comfort food.

Grief

Get a really lot of onions. Invite participants to peel and chop. Cook very slowly to carmelize and sweeten your grief.



Give each participant an "&" cookie; ask them to think about what they are doing beyond processing their rage, grief, and need for comfort.



Ampersand Cookies:

Any good rolled cookie recipe will do, preferably not too sweet and fairly sturdy. Press with an "&" shape and cut out in squares. The original "&" cookies were made with some rye flour and a strong anise flavor.

Spatula&Barcode developed "Rage Grief Comfort &" for the "Municipal" art show in Madison, WI, USA on 10 December, 2016, when more than a hundred artists moved into a shuttered city administrative building for a one-day community event. With the public, Spatula&Barcode processed hundreds of pounds of vegetables and gave away nearly 2000 "&" cookies. The leftover food was served to the artists the next day as the show was de-installed. Spatula&Barcode continues to distribute "&" cookies on occasion as a gentle nudge to process our feelings into action.

info: spatulaandbarcode@gmail.com spatulaandbarcode.wordpress.com spatulaandbarcode.net http://madisonbubbler.org/municipal/



We think that as the SERCs are imagined, there's a place for something like our project as a way of saying "feelings, yes—now what?"

The project was also featured at the <u>Corban Estate Arts Centre</u> in Auckland New Zealand as part of <u>The 45th Landlord</u>, an exhibition of "responses by American artists and organisations to events occurring before and after Trump's inauguration." In addition to posting documentation of the Madison project, gallerists in New Zealand also baked Ampersand cookies using their own mold.



For our part, we've continued to bake Ampersand cookies for activists on multiple occasions including the Madison Women's March, meetings of Madison's Arts Activism Work Group, exhibitions of Arts for Social Change, and other civic and political occasions.



Photo by Clark Peterson

We hope that publication in this volume of *Lateral* will extend our open source project to new communities. We consider the idea for the project, and especially the Ampersand Cookie concept, to be free culture, available to reuse or remix. If you stage an event inspired by this essay, let us know and we'll send you a Spatula&Barcode souvenir.

Recipe: Ampersand Cookies

Spatula&Barcode's Ampersand Cookies

This recipe is different every time we make them. The first base recipe had cream as well as butter. The cookies are not too sweet, and we've yet to feel we over-did either the anise or the cloves.

Beat: 450gr butter + 450gr sugar

Mix in: 3 eggs (~150gr), 50gr olive oil, 10gr anise extract

Mix & mix in: 100gr rye flour, 100gr semolina flour, 600gr apf
+ 20gr sea salt, 5gr baking powder, 5gr ground cloves

Wrap and chill: at least 1 hour, up to 48 hours

Roll out to ~1/4" or 7mm

Press ampersands deeply with floured press
Cut between cookies

Bake at ~400F/200C for 12-20 minutes

Re-cut between and cool completely

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Spatula&Barcode

Spatula&Barcode makes art projects in which the performance of place and of hospitality are central. Most projects involve conversation and some form of playful gift or souvenir ("swag"). While most Spatula&Barcode projects involve food in some way, their recent series *Foodways* directly explores the movements of food and food culture. Spatula&Barcode is a "social practice art" group that combines many activities in their projects: interviews and interactions, social media, photography, writing, and public events. Spatula&Barcode is the umbrella name for the work that Michael Peterson and Laurie Beth Clark make together, but they often say that anyone who works on one of the projects is a part of Spatula&Barcode. (Clark and Peterson are Professors of Art at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.)



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Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

No Pestilence at the Border

Lindsay Garcia

Introduction

"They treat us like pests," remarked an El Salvadoran man attempting to acquire health care in the Washington DC area in 2012. More than 100 years earlier, the 1911 Dillingham Immigration Commission, a federal bipartisan effort to study issues related to immigration from 1907–1911, stated: "We should exercise at least as much care in admitting human beings [to the United States] as we exercise in relation to animals or insect pests or disease germs." These kinds of xenophobic comparisons are historic and commonplace in American history, although they have shifted over time based on different historic, international, and cultural events and conflicts that target particular populations. With recent events such as President Donald Trump's plan to build an impenetrable wall between the United States and Mexico, and make Mexico pay for it, these immigrant-pest correlations continue to escalate, especially in the American media. A

No Pestilence at the Border explores the political rhetoric of immigration as it pertains to pest metaphors and pest control discourse, specifically how it plays out in the media regarding crossings of the US-Mexico border. The most basic definition of a "pest" is an animal that is "out of place," a phrase that borrows from Mary Douglas's foundational structuralist text *Purity and Danger* on dirt and taboos. Immigrants, too, are often "out of place," displaced, or in between places. They live between the world in which they are from and the world in which they inhabit presently. There is no universal immigrant. Instead, there are a multiplicity of immigrants who choose or are coerced to cross the US-Mexican border due to factors such as labor, climate, and family, among others; these people are also differentiated by many diverse elements such as identity, ability, health, nationality, ethnicity, race, class, gender/sex, employment status, and familial organization. There are also a myriad of different kinds of pests with different species, origins, morphologies, behavioral tactics, social, and cultural structures. While immigrants and pests are not equivalent in their challenges and oppressions, they are both liminal figures, and this liminal-ness makes some people uncomfortable.

No Pestilence at the Border evolved from exploring recent rhetorical comparisons between immigrants and pests made by Republican politicians and their supporters. Clearly, even if I am advocating that we review how we think about pest animals, it is always already problematic to draw any kind of parallel between marginalized humans and nonhumans. While there is no essential correlation between immigrants and pests, and to say so would encourage further prejudice, there is a historical, rhetorical, and material entanglement. For instance, I recently studied the long entangled history of African Americans and American cockroaches that began on the slave ship. 6 Recognizing

this entanglement allows us to step back and subvert the rhetoric that disempowers immigrants as well as uproot the long-existing ideologies and discriminations of these marginalized human and nonhumans. There has to be a way to advocate for both the marginalized humans and the marginalized nonhumans of the politician's rants.

One method would be to appropriate the metaphorical parallels between immigrants and nonhuman pests, turn them on their head, and use them in a positive manner toward proimmigration activism. One pro-immigration Latinx activist Xavier Hermosillo has already embraced the sentiment of a future "invasion" of Hispanic immigrants: "We will take over house by house, block by block. We may not overcome, but we will overwhelm." While there are problems with this tactic as well, Hermosillo's use of pestilent rhetoric comes at the issue from a place of empowerment instead of dehumanization. The adoption of pestilent rhetoric, in the spirit of feminists taking back the word "cunt," could be used to say something like "Yes, we are rats; your impenetrable walls don't scare us; we will always find ways to overcome your surveillance, your above and below ground sensors; we will climb over your walls." ${}^{\underline{8}}$ The work that I am suggesting is absurdist, and it is also important to note that crossing the border is not always a fully empowered choice or a playful hike through the desert. There is a whole system of coyotes, the side effects of human trafficking, intersections with drug cartels and Minutemen, dust, dehydration, and heat exhaustion, snakes, and other animals. And once you make it, if you don't die in the desert or get discovered and sent back to Mexico, there are challenges like finding housing, employment, and resources, and constantly avoiding the notice of ICE and INS, among others.

The following poem appropriates anti-immigration pest rhetoric yet recognizes the strength of individuals who cross or attempt to cross the US-Mexico border. The poem vacillates between narrators and voices, attempting to capture some of the challenges and nuances of immigrant-pest correlatives and entangled histories as well as the experiences of border-crossers and those who support them stateside. Art and language have the power to shape the world and to improve the lives of humans and nonhumans in different and intersecting ways by stepping outside of traditional visual juxtapositions and grammar structures to envision a more hospitable world for all.

Poem

You came here
to live in the shadows 10
amongst the drops of rain
that commingle on branches

in the morning 11

You came here

thirsty 12

in the shadows of ships

slave ships even

hitching a ride from the West Coast of Africa

to the Southern United States 13

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You came here
in the shadows of trade routes
thirsty 14
from China to Europe
in the Middle Ages 15
You scurried here 16
last week
from Mexico
across the desert
thirsty
thirsty
thirsty
You came here
to live in the shadows
You didn't come here
thirsty
with an expectation
that you would demand
a path to citizenship 17
You will eat all my food
or spoil it
with your little leg hairs
and shit 18
I leave droplets of water
for you 19
Angels and ranchers
leave buckets of water
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for you²⁰

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No matter what I do
your thirst drives you
to penetrate the wall\frac{21}{}
through cracks
crevices
weak links
You are rapists 22
penetrating my home
the ears and eyes of my children\frac{23}{}
You can go out there
like rats
and multiply<sup>24</sup>
making your own children
playing with mine \frac{25}{}
You operate in the dark \frac{26}{}
You come across the borders
like rats and roaches
in the woodpile \frac{27}{}
like rats and roaches
in the stowage of ships \frac{28}{}
stowaways
on boats and rafts and swimming
The reason you are so bad now
they believe
is because of the warm winters 29
```

They think we've got to get control

```
They think
that's what we need to know
They think
that you are a monster
created to slay
at the end of the day \frac{30}{2}
They want to kill the rat
and break up the families of the rat\frac{31}{2}
They don't want you to come back
They don't want to let you use their deodorant
or drink their water
or sleep in their beds\frac{32}{}
They say
you don't belong
in their house
at all
They say
they don't even have to kill you
just use e-verification of citizenship 33
that you will find the conditions so intolerable \frac{34}{}
that you will head back to the nest
They say
you are just a little bigger
than a grasshopper 35
that you'll scatter
and they'll be able to catch you.
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A border with no fence is like a house with no doors where you can come and go as you please. 37 I left you water last night too I don't want you to die in the desert They say they will build a wall but there are already walls 38 Humans have built walls around their homes states countries to keep pests like you out since the beginning of time And you have always penetrated them always came in uninvited Your thirst drove you No matter what I do no matter what I do you always come in swarms, and infestations and no matter what I do

You never give up

you always come in

You rise up³⁹

Notes

- Carol Cleaveland and Emily S. Ihara, "'They Treat us Like Pests:' Undocumented Immigrant Experiences Obtaining Health Care in the Wake of a Crackdown Ordinance," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 22 (2012): 783–784.
- 2. Quoted in Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples At Home and Abroad, 1876–1917* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2001), 199.
- 3. In a speech on August 31, 2016, then President-Elect Donald J. Trump announced that he was going to build a wall on the US-Mexico border and make Mexico pay for it:

Number one, are you ready? Are you ready? We will build a great wall along the southern border. And Mexico will pay for the wall. One hundred percent. They don't know it yet, but they're going to pay for it. And they're great people and great leaders but they're going to pay for the wall. On day one, we will begin working on intangible, physical, tall, power, beautiful southern border wall. We will use the best technology, including above and below ground sensors that's the tunnels. Remember that, above and below. Above and below ground sensors. Towers, aerial surveillance and manpower to supplement the wall, find and dislocate tunnels and keep out criminal cartels and Mexico you know that, will work with us. I really believe it. Mexico will work with us. I absolutely believe it. And especially after meeting with their wonderful, wonderful president today. I really believe they want to solve this problem along with us, and I'm sure they will."

Quoted in *Los Angeles Times* staff, "Transcript: Donald Trump's full immigration speech, annotated," *Los Angeles Times*, August 31, 2016, http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-donald-trump-immigration-speech-transcript-20160831-snap-htmlstory.html.

- 4. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1966), 44. 2
- 5. For clarification, not all Republican politicians are xenophobic or racist, and not all compare humans and nonhuman animals. And there are Democrats and people with other party affiliations who are or who do, but to provide further detail is outside the scope of this particular introduction and poem.
- 6. Lindsay Garcia, "American Cockroaches, Racism, and the Ecology of the Slave Ship," *Arcadia*, no. 29 (Autumn 2017), http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/8048.
- 7. Although Hermosilla is a Republican, he is very pro-immigration. Partially quoted in Los Angeles Times staff, "The Talk of the Town: KMPC's Xavier Hermosillo Finally Smashed Through Los Angeles Radio's Ethnic Barrier in 1994," Los Angeles Times, January 01, 1995, http://articles.latimes.com/1995-01-01/news/ci-15608_1_los-angeles. The full quotation comes from a far-right publication which censures Hermosillo for his liberal immigration views: Thomas Clough, "Thunder in Arizona,"

- 8. For more information on the history of the word "cunt" as it pertains to women, please see Inga Muscio, Cunt: A Declaration of Independence, Expanded and Updated Second Edition (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2002).
- 9. On the biological and ecological challenges of crossing the US-Mexican border: Edward Helmore, "'Death map' of deserts aims to save lives of desperate Mexican migrants," The Guardian, June 1, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/01/map-us-mexico-migrant-deaths-

border.

- 10. "Living in the shadows" is a common metaphor utilized by many different people, disciplinary fields, and media genres/perspectives for those who experience the daily challenges of being an undocumented immigrant. Representative Steve King (R-IA) argues that Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients should be relegated to the margins of society instead of receiving the government protection afforded to them during the Obama era. On September 6, 2017, King stated, "They continue to live the objective that they sought to achieve when they illegally entered America. Live in the shadows. Live in the shadows and if you get crossways with the law, then the law requires they be placed in criminal proceedings and go home. I think there's justice there, but we need to provide justice." Quoted in Lauren Fox, "Rep. Steve King: DACA recipients should 'live in the shadows," CNN, http://www.cnn.com/2017/09/06/politics/steve-king-daca-shadowcomments/index.html.
- 11. One of the main causes of immigration to the United States from Central and South America is climate change. Essentially, the heating climate creates drought, which forces those who work in agriculture and other jobs to venture north in search of wetter land and more resources to help with field irrigation. This is well argued in Part IV of Christian Parenti, Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence (New York: Nation Books, 2012).
- 12. Thirst and not having enough potable water are huge problems for those brave souls who attempt to cross the US-Mexico border. This is well documented in Jason De León, "'Better to Be Hot than Caught': Excavating the Conflicting Roles of Migrant Material Culture," *American Anthropologist* 114, no. 3 (2012): 477–495. Additionally, law enforcement or local militias such as the Minutemen harass many people and organizations that leave water caches in the desert. One such story is documented in Adam Cohen, "The Crime of Giving Water to Thirsty People," TIME, September 8, 2010,
 - http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2016513,00.html. Additionally, artists endeavor to use technologies to navigate immigrants to water caches, such as Electronic Disturbance Theater (headed by Ricardo Dominguez and Brett Stalbaum) and b.a.n.g. lab who produced The Transborder Immigrant Tool, described in Leila Nadir, "Poetry, Immigration and the FBI: The Transborder Immigrant Tool," Hyperallergic, July 23, 2012, https://hyperallergic.com/54678/poetry-immigrationand-the-fbi-the-transborder-immigrant-tool/.
- 13. For the historical entanglement between African Americans and American cockroaches, see Garcia, "American Cockroaches, Racism, and the Ecology of the Slave Ship." For documentation of the American cockroach venturing to the United States on slave ships, see James A. G. Rehn, "Man's Fellow Traveler—The Cockroach," The Scientific Monthly 61, no. 4 (October 1945): 265-276. For the proving of the

slave ship as not the only way that American cockroaches came to the United States, see William J. Bell and K. G. Adiyodi, eds., *The American Cockroach* (London and New York: Chapman and Hall, 1981).

- 14. One of the main ways that humans kill mice and rats (at industrial scales, no less) is by feeding them a particular type of poison called D-Con. How D-Con works is that it slowly dehydrates the rodents and forces them to search for water. Ultimately, their bodies distend as they expire, hopefully away from human habitations. This is not a humane way of dying. Old school snap traps, with the instantaneous snap of the neck is much more humane. So while using D-Con against rodents isn't the same thing as humans trying to escape from challenging economic and political situations and expiring of dehydration in the desert, the lack of humanity in both circumstances draws a sort of resonance between the situations. For more information on D-Con, see http://www.d-conproducts.com.
- 15. Norway rats, the most common pest species in the United States, possibly originated in China and entered Europe through Norway via trade ships in the mid-1500s. It is possible that they arrived in the United States from Britain during the Revolutionary War. For a brief overview on the Norway rat, visit the Global Invasive Species Database, http://www.iucngisd.org/gisd/speciesname/Rattus+norvegicus. Another excellent resource is University of Michigan's Animal Diversity Web:
- 16. The phrases "scurry across the border" and "scurried across the border" have been naturalized in the media to describe people crossing borders, especially that of US-Mexico. "To scurry" is an action that we would typically associate with small rodents such as mice and rats. Here are some news stories which use this metaphor to refer to migrants crossing the US-Mexico border: James C. McKinley, Jr., "On a Paper Border, Mexico's Poor Hide, Scramble, and Hope," *The New York Times*, May 25, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/25/world/americas/on-a-paper-border-mexicos-poor-hide-scramble-and-hope.html. Blake Morlock, "Never Mind the Border Wall, Legal Immigration System Is the Big Fix," *Tucson Sentinel*, December 5, 2016, http://www.tucsonsentinel.com/opinion/report/120516_migration_op/never-mind-border-wall-legal-immigration-system-big-fix/. Jean Hopfensperger, "Immigration Law: El Salvadoran Family Fights Deportation," *Star Tribune*, July 30, 2009, http://www.startribune.com/immigration-law-el-salvadoran-family-fights-deportation/52032302/. □
- 17. Representative Steve King (R-IA) said of undocumented immigrants, "They came here to live in the shadows, they didn't come here with an expectation that they would demand a path to citizenship." Quoted in Mark Hensch, "GOP Rep: Illegal Immigrants Here 'To Live in the Shadows," The Hill, November 25, 2015, http://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/presidential-races/261286-gop-rep-illegalimmigrants-here-to-live-in-the-shadows. King has a long history of desiring immigrants to "live in the shadows," which has continued in 2017, as noted in footnote 10. President Barack Obama supported immigration bills that allowed for paths to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, although Republicans in Congress continuously opposed them. David Nakamura, "Obama Pushes For Path to Citizenship in Immigration Bill," The Washington Post, July 16, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-pushes-for-path-to-citizenship-inimmigration-bill/2013/07/16/63142a26-ee38-11e2-bed3b9b6fe264871_story.html?utm_term=.06ca3a8938d2. President Donald Trump continues to flip flop on the issue. At first, Trump suspended the DACA order for Dreamers, individuals who came to the United States illegally as children; however,

later on, his administration allegedly supported a path to citizenship for Dreamers, stating that they should be allowed to stay in the United States. It's challenging to know today, November 28, 2017, exactly where the President stands on this issue. Ed Kilgore, "Trump Administration Comes Out for Path to Citizenship, a.k.a. Amnesty, for Dreamers," *New York Magazine*, October 3, 2017, http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/10/trump-administration-comes-outfor-amnesty-for-dreamers.html.

- 18. The interiors of cockroach bodies do not serve as vectors for many diseases.

 However, they do carry bacteria and other harmful pathogens on their leg hairs. For more information, see Elaine Bush, "Avoid Health Risks by Keeping Cockroaches out of Your Home," Michigan State University Extension, October 8, 2015,

 http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/avoid_health_risks_by_keeping_cockroaches_out_of_your_home.

 Additionally, there are an acceptable amount of insect particles and rodent feces allowed by the FDA in processed foods of which they call "defects." FDA Defect Levels Handbook, U.S. Food and Drug Administration,

 https://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/GuidanceDocumentsRegulatoryInformation/SanitationTra
- 19. This image is from the film *A Bug's Life* (1998, directed by John Lasseter and Andrew Stanton), specifically the scene where the protagonist Flik ventures to the city and ends up in a bar. The "drinks" that the bartender provides to his clientele are droplets of water or blood depending on the insect species.

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20. There are nonprofit organizations that help immigrants cross the borders by leaving caches of water in the desert borderlands. Border Angels is one such organization (http://www.borderangels.org). Humane Borders is another (https://humaneborders.org). Some ranchers also leave water on their properties for border crossers, although this is a controversial subject: Cindy Carcamo, "Arizona Couple Near Border Have Complex View of Immigration," Los Angeles Times, March 21, 2013, http://articles.latimes.com/2013/mar/21/nation/la-na-ff-chilton-ranch-20130321; Jack Jenkins, "What It's Really Like to Cross the U.S.-Mexico Border," Think Progress, February 10, 2015, https://thinkprogress.org/what-its-really-liketo-cross-the-u-s-mexico-border-a375d80f3cc/. Additionally, there are people who poison water caches or remove water from the desert to trip up border crossers. The Minuteman Project, which is now defunct, was a militia of concerned citizens who tasked themselves with enforcing tight border control. More information on that project can be found here: http://baesic.net/minutemanproject/. A 2012 documentary also describes their mission: http://www.theminutemenmovie.com. Shane Bauer went undercover with a border militia, and his account describes such incidents. Shane Bauer, "I Went Undercover with a Border Militia. Here's What I Saw," Mother Jones, Nov/Dec 2016, http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/10/undercover-border-militia-

http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/10/undercover-border-militiaimmigration-bauer/.

21. While the verb "to penetrate" has multiple meanings including "to pass into or through," "to enter by overcoming resistance," and "to affect deeply the senses or feelings," the most colloquial use of this verb is in a sexual sense, for when the penis penetrates the vagina during intercourse. Additionally, "penetrate" is often used to describe how pest animals cross borders and walls within the home. While this is not fully explored in this introduction and poem, there is a correlation between the fear of animals and insects penetrating the walls of a home, the fear of immigrants penetrating the political borders, and the fear of rape—something to be explored in future projects. President Donald Trump's use of "rapists" to describe Mexicans further elucidates this connection (explored in footnote 22). "Penetrate," Merriam-Webster, updated on November 14, 2017, https://www.merriam-

immigrants n 782102.html.

- 22. President Donald Trump has a history of insulting Mexico and Mexicans. In the announcement for his presidential candidacy on June 16, 2015, he stated, "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending the best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people." Quoted in "Here's Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech," *TIME*, June 16, 2015, http://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/.
- 23. There are countless accounts of people who have had bugs, such as cockroaches, crawl into their ear canals. This article provides a list of the different species that can easily penetrate the body: Erika Englehaupt, "A Horrifying List of Creatures That Can Crawl Into Your Body," *National Geographic*, February 14, 2017, https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/02/roach-in-nose-ear-insects-science/. The likelihood of this happening depends largely upon whether someone has an infestation in their home. Infestations do not occur evenly across various social sectors. The poor often cannot afford to live in homes that have proper pest control measures in place.
- 24. One of the challenges that people face with rats is how rapidly they reproduce. This guide made by *Chicago Magazine* shows how within one year, 15,000 descendants can generate from a single rat: "Rats!" http://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/March-2015/here-a-rat-there-a-rat-everywhere-a-rat-rat/. Republican Tennessee state representative Curry Todd appropriated this notion, comparing pregnant undocumented immigrants to rats. He stated, "They can go out there like rats and multiply." Todd argued that pregnant women should be required to confirm their citizenship status prior to being accepted for treatment at medical facilities. Although he apologized, stating that instead of comparing the women to rats, he should have called them "anchor babies," he still admits to the original sentiment. Quoted in Nick Wing, "Tennessee GOPer Curry Todd: Illegal Immigrants Will Multiply 'Like Rats," *Huffington Post*, November 11, 2010, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/11/11/curry-todd-illegal-
- 25. While some children become obsessed with pest animals, such as Shelby Counterman, whose story was told on the TLC network (TLC, "Obsessed with Collecting Cockroaches | My Kid's Obsession," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bO2SjCtmB_Q), others are traumatized and/or sickened by pest animals. Even some pest-species pets, such as rats, can cause troublesome effects, such as Rat-bite Fever ("Rat-bite Fever," Center for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/rat-bite-fever/index.html). Other species, especially insects such as cockroaches, can actually crawl inside of human orifices as described in footnote 23. See also this account of a pediatric surgeon removing a cockroach from a patient's ear: Nina Shapiro, "The Cockroach in His Ear," Dr. Nina Shapiro, accessed November 21, 2017, https://drninashapiro.com/safety/the-cockroach-in-his-ear. Additionally cockroach feces can cause instances of asthma for children who live in infested homes. "Cockroach Allergies," Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, accessed November 21, 2017, https://www.aafa.org/page/cockroach-allergy.aspx.
- 26. Many pest species such as cockroaches, mice, and rats come out of their nests and/or hiding places and into homes when the lights go out and the humans are in

- bed. It is also true that along the US-Mexico border, migrants have to do a lot of moving at night because it is the coolest temperature-wise and it is harder for immigration police to detect moving bodies. Additionally, migrants paint their water bottles black to evade detection from border officials. De León, "Better to Be Hot than Caught," 477–495.
- 27. The mother-in-law (who goes unnamed in records of the event) of Citizens United President and Chairman David Bossie during the 2015 South Carolina Freedom Summit (which Bossie organized) compared immigrants to pests: "People are coming to this country across the borders like rats and roaches in the woodpile." Usercreated clip, "GOP Crowd Applauds Calling Immigrants Rats and Roaches," C-Span, May 20, 2015, https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4537174/gop-crowd-applauds-calling-immigrants-rats-roaches.
- 28. For more information on cockroaches on ships, see Richard Schweid, *The Cockroach Papers: A Compendium of History and Lore* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). For more information on rats, ships, and how they spread across the world, see Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- 29. Gerard Brown, program manager of the Rodent and Vector Control Division of the D.C. Department of Health (a.k.a. "the rat czar") commented on the growing rat problem in the city in 2016: "The reason the rats are so bad now, we believe, is because of the warm winters." Quoted in Petula Dvorak, "I Saw 13 Rats in 20 Minutes. D.C., We Have a Rodent Crisis," *The Washington Post*, October 17, 2016, <a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/i-saw-13-rats-in-20-minutes-dc-we-have-a-rodent-crisis/2016/10/17/ba7dcef0-949f-11e6-bb29-bf2701dbe0a3_story.html?utm_term=.af9c8977850c.
- 30. Javier Palomarez, the head of the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce stated in response to then presidential candidate Donald Trump that "Immigration reform is a monster that he {Trump} created so he could slay it at the end of he day. It's not going to change things for this nation as we move forward here. We have to deal with a broken immigration system, obviously. But it's got to be done in a strategic fashion that makes sense on a going forward basis to fire up people and get this kind of hate-filled, you know, this movement of hatred. It doesn't solve anything." Quoted in Nick Gass, "Critics Ream Trump Immigration Address," *Politico*, September 1, 2016, https://www.politico.com/story/2016/09/trump-speech-reaction-227620.
- 31. During a 2012 appearance on "The Morning Majority," a conservative radio program, Republican Ken Cuccinelli, the former Attorney General of Virginia, made a statement in reference to Washington DC's current pest control policies and how he saw them intersecting with DC's 2010 Wildlife Protection Act, which he thought pertained to rats. He made an unfortunate turn-of-phrase which renders the bodies of immigrants disposable in a similar fashion to rats. Cuccinelli stated, "They have to relocate the rats. And, not only that, that's actually not the worst part, they cannot break up the families of the rats! So, anyway, it is worse than our immigration policy. You cannot break up rat families. Or raccoons, and all the rest, and you can't even kill 'em. It's unbelievable." Quoted in Nick Wing, "Ken Cuccinelli Once Compared Immigration Policy to Pest Control, Exterminating Rats," *Huffington Post*, July 26, 2013, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/26/ken-cuccinelli-immigration-rats n 3658064.html.
- 32. During a Q&A session with Furman University Students on October 31, 2011, Representative Jeff Duncan (R-SC) stated "It's kind of like having a house—and you're not homeowners, a lot of folks in this room, but your moms and dads are—taking the door off the hinges and allowing any kind of vagrant, or animal, or just somebody that's hungry, or somebody that wants to do your dishes for you, to come

in. And you can't say, 'No you can't come in.' And you can't say, 'No you can't stay all night.' Or 'No, you can't have this benefit, using my deodorant.'" Quoted in "Jeff Duncan, South Carolina Rep, Compares Undocumented Immigrants to Vagrants, Animals," *Huffington Post*, November 2, 2011,

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/02/jeff-duncan-south-carolina-immigrants n 1071695.html.

- 33. The US Government requires that all employers verify the citizenship status of their employees upon hire. "E-verify," Department of Homeland Security, accessed November 21, 2017, https://www.uscis.gov/e-verify.
- 34. Ron Scarbro, author of a pro-Trump, anti-immigration op-ed in his local Minnesota newspaper *The Newsleaders*, compared undocumented immigrants to "vermin and pests." He wrote,

The final listing on the Yellow Pages is Deport or Nail Aliens and Lowlife Drug Smugglers, or "DONALD'S." Their operator is emphatic. Vermin and pests are just that, vermin and pests. They don't belong in your house. You didn't invite them in and they refuse to leave. If you don't act and act quickly, they will gnaw at the foundation of your house until it's destroyed. They will continue to reproduce, thereby creating millions more of their kind to destroy not only your house but your neighbor's as well. Here at DONALD'S we have a special treatment that denies these pest and vermin food or opportunity. It's called "E-Verification of Citizenship." We don't even have to kill them. They leave on their own because they find the living conditions intolerable. They go scrambling back to where they came from. Then DONALD'S builds a wall to prevent them from returning. At that point you can rebuild your home strengthened in the knowledge future visitors will be here only be invitation.

Quoted in Walter Hudson, "Trump Supporter Authors Op-Ed Calling Immgrants 'Pests and Vermin," *PJ Media*, May 13, 2016, https://pimedia.com/trending/2016/05/13/trump-supporter-authors-op-ed-calling-

immigrants-pests-and-vermin/.

35. Representative Ted Poe (R-TX) on the floor of the US House of Representatives compares undocumented immigrants to "grasshoppers." He stated,

Now it seems to me that if we are so advanced with technology and manpower and competence that we can capture illegal grasshoppers from Brazil, in the holds of ships that are in a small little place in Port Arthur, Texas on the Sabine River. Sabine River, madam speaker, is the river that separates Texas from Louisiana. If we're able to do that as a country, how come we can't capture the thousands of people that cross the border everyday on the southern border of the United States? You know they're a little bigger than grasshoppers and they should be able to be captured easier.

Quoted in "Ted Poe: Congressman Compares Illegal Immigrants to Grasshoppers," *Huffington Post*, June 30, 2010, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/04/30/ted-poe-congressman-compa_n_558576.html.

36. Regarding Jeff Duncan's remarks (noted in footnote 32), Allen Klump commented, "Congressman Duncan was simply saying what South Carolinians already know, that securing our borders is just like securing our homes. A border with no fence is like a house with no doors, where anyone or anything can come and go as they please.

Congressman Duncan believes we have to secure our borders and enforce our immigration laws." "Jeff Duncan, South Carolina Rep, Compares Undocumented Immigrants to Vagrants, Animals," *The Huffington Post*, November 2, 2011, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/02/jeff-duncan-south-carolina-immigrants_n_1071695.html.

- 37. "Jeff Duncan, South Carolina Rep, Compares Undocumented Immigrants." 🔁
- 38. It is a misconception that there are no walls or fences at the US-Mexico border.

 James Whitlow Delano, "This Is What the U.S.-Mexico Border Wall Actually Looks Like," *National Geographic*, March 4, 2016,

https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/03/160304-us-mexico-border-fence-wall-photos-immigration/.

39. This phrase references both Andra Day's song "Rise Up" and Lin-Manuel Miranda's song "My Shot" from the musical *Hamilton*.

≜ Bio



Lindsay Garcia

Lindsay Garcia is a video, performance, and social practice artist as well as a PhD Candidate in American Studies and an Equality Lab Fellow at the College of William & Mary. Her artwork thematically engages with queer intersectional feminism, politics and current events, nonhuman animals and nature, human structures, and waste. Her dissertation explores how border and boundary crossings of pest animals and pesticides reveal issues of environmental justice from a queer, posthumanist, visual studies perspective. Garcia received a BFA in Sculpture from Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), an MFA in Interdisciplinary Visual Arts from SUNY Purchase, an MA in Contemporary Art from Sotheby's Institute of Art, and an MA in American Studies from the College of William and Mary in 2016. Her MA Thesis "Capitalist Architecture in a Posthumanist World" won the Arts and Sciences Distinguished Thesis Award in the Humanities at the College of William & Mary. At SUNY Purchase, she won the Outstanding MFA Award, and at RISD, she won the Senior Sculpture Prize. Garcia has exhibited her artwork in New York (NY), Philadelphia (PA), Washington, D.C., San Jose (CA), Richmond (VA), Providence (RI), Wooster (OH), Torrington (CT), and Bergen (NJ). Garcia has published in ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance and Lateral.



Liane Tanguay, "Review of 'The Cultural Politics of U.S. Immigration: Gender, Race and Media' by Leah Perry (NYU Press)," *Lateral 6.2* (2017).

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Book Reviews

Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

Review of *The Cultural Politics of U.S. Immigration: Gender, Race and Media* by Leah Perry (NYU Press)

Liane Tanguay

The Cultural Politics of U.S. Immigration: Gender, Race and Media. By Leah Perry. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2016, x + 344 pp. (paperback) ISBN 9781479823864 US List \$30.

Amid a disturbing resurgence of nativist sentiment and policy, of which the Dreamers' Act is just the latest high-profile casualty, Leah Perry's *The Cultural Politics of U.S. Immigration: Gender, Race, and Media* is a timely exposition of how our racialized and gendered immigration paradigms came about as well as what makes them uniquely neoliberal. Perry offers a meticulous account of immigration reform in the 1980s and 90s—including how it negotiated, accommodated, and ultimately co-opted the gains of feminism and multiculturalism—while also showing how its discourses were refracted in popular culture and thus within the lived experience of a hegemonic neoliberalism.

Perry's methodology is an ambitious one that combines cultural studies and intersectional feminism, along with critical legal studies, queer theory, critical race and ethnic studies, and media studies (22). Invoking Gramscian "common sense" as it applies to the intersections between culture and the law, Perry links the legislative debates to the circulation of tropes, images, and narratives that helped to inculcate the dominant value system around immigration within mainstream American culture. But these values are not merely a subset of neoliberal "common sense"; Perry claims that the debates and the cultural mediations alike advanced the neoliberal agenda as a whole and "masked and/or rationalized the racist and sexist social relations that structure neoliberalism" writ large (16). Overall, she makes an impressive case for the centrality of the period's immigration discourses to the cohesion of a neoliberal ethos encompassing class, ethnicity, nation, race, and gender.

Each chapter highlights a different aspect of immigration policymaking alongside its popular mediations. In Perry's roughly chronological account, the Mariel Boatlift incident of 1980 brought together the major threads that would continue to inform immigration policy and public perception over the coming decades: the idea of the United States as a bastion of humanitarianism relative to Communist and other repressive regimes; the "emergency" rhetoric that fed subsequent expressions of nativism, fear, and intolerance; and the ascendancy of the "nation of immigrants" myth that, based on an idealized account of white ethnic immigration, helped to designate "other" non-white immigrants as dangerous, unassimilable, excessively fertile, and/or an intractable burden on the state. It was here that a dialectic was established between the "nation of immigrants" trope and

that of the "immigration emergency," not only in policy debates but also in popular culture, where racialized stereotypes proliferated side-by-side with feel-good, multicultural success stories that positioned America as a beacon of opportunity for anyone with the right grip on their bootstraps.

Gender became especially salient in debates around family reunification—specifically in the context of the "culture wars," amid a conservative "family values" backlash that sought to reinforce a heteronormative and patriarchal standard aligned with neoliberal ideals of self-sufficiency. Debates around welfare were equally gendered, invoking the image of the fecund Latina as a threat to America's moral and economic well-being while pathologizing single-mother households in a specifically racialized way. To the extent that the welfare cuts coincided with the broader reconfiguration of the welfare state, their racialized and gendered aspects support the connection Perry seeks to establish between immigration reform and the neoliberal project as a whole. And again, this backlash is caught up in contradictory messaging about the United States as a model of women's liberation and empowerment—a paradigm advanced in popular culture even as legislators set about denying immigrant women precisely what they needed to achieve conservative standards of "respectable" maternity.

The chapter on "crimmigration" ties the law's production of the "criminal alien" to the regime of increasingly punitive laws enabled by the War on Drugs and the prison-industrial complex, while also exploring popular images of the Latino gang-banger in an overall "climate of fear" (149). But the ostensibly "softer" aspects of immigration policy, such as amnesty, had troubling undersides as well, a tension Perry explores in her chapter on the "Latino/a Explosion" of the 1990s. Discourses on amnesty emphasize the ostensible color-blindness of "nation of immigrants" normativity while at the same time tokenizing racialized and gendered success stories as evidence that anyone can "make it." Anyone struck by the contradiction between the commodification of racialized and gendered bodies, on the one hand, and their vilification and marginalization on the other, will find this section to be of particular explanatory value.

Ultimately, Perry convincingly shows how Reagan-era conservatives navigated feminist and civil-rights gains while maintaining the case for racist and patriarchal legal and policy frameworks in the realm of immigration and beyond. And it does stand to reason that immigration discourses were central to the cohesion of neoliberal "common sense," given that so much of the latter rests on what it means to be "American." Her interdisciplinary approach helps to make sense of the apparent contradiction between the feel-good inclusivity of many popular texts (as well as liberal rhetoric) and the reactionary definition of "deserving" citizenship against which not only immigrants but other "deviant" citizens are subsequently "othered"— which is exactly how neoliberalism separates valuable from "disposable" life in general.

The extent to which immigration discourses *drive* this cohesion is less clear. Capitalism has always organized race and gender to suit its needs—a point not lost on Perry, who sees throughout immigration history the link between race, gender, and capitalism, and for whom, indeed, the tension between nativism and the need for cheap labour is always in play. But some of the stereotypes she invokes did not arise in a vacuum: the violent Latino and hypersexualized Latina, for instance, fit the "common sense" of a culture that has long seen African-Americans cast in a similar light. Further, some of the cultural analyses, while relevant, can seem superficial, touching only on content as it mirrors, rather than mediates, the tropes deployed by the lawmakers.

But these comparatively minor issues do not undermine Perry's broader contribution to an underexamined chapter in the neoliberalization of law, discourse, and culture—an

analysis that will interest scholars of media, popular culture, and immigration policy alike, and that, in the true spirit of humanistic inquiry, reveals the work of culture in the circuitry of power.

å Bio



Liane Tanguay

Liane Tanguay earned her Ph.D. at the University of Manchester under the supervision of Professor Terry Eagleton. She is the author of Hijacking History: Representing the War on Terror in American Culture (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012) as well as assorted articles and book chapters, and is currently an Assistant Professor of English and Cultural Studies at the University of Houston-Victoria.



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Book Reviews

Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

Review of *Necroculture* by Charles Thorpe (Palgrave Macmillan)

Seth Cosimini

Necroculture. By Charles Thorpe. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 270 pp. (hardcover) ISBN 978 1 137 58302 4. US List: \$99.99.

Building upon a variety of works from Karl Marx and Marxist psychologist Erich Fromm, Charles Thorpe's *Necroculture* attempts to demonstrate that the variegated experiences of alienation under the technocratic culture of neoliberal capital are experiences tantamount to a culture of death. The collection of five essays examining different aspects of this culture of death build from a synthesis of Marx's understanding of alienation and Fromm's "necrophilia." Beyond the obvious markers of a cultural attraction to death—such as a popular culture fascinated with the prospect of a zombie apocalypse (28) or an industry dedicated to supplying "doomsday preppers" (211)—Thorpe suggests that the root of the necrophilia that defines contemporary capitalist culture is in the valuing of non-living objects over living human beings. In the alienation and replacement of imperfect human labor with automated dead labor and in a highly atomized consumer culture where social participation is mediated by commodity fetishism, the non-living are given priority over the living. For Thorpe, this constitutes a culture that worships death, that is, dead labor.

The opening chapter helpfully situates Thorpe's terminology and claim that we are living in a culture that "aggrandizes the dead and non-living over the living" (2). Through an exegesis of Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* in conjunction with analyses of popular cultural artifacts representing the living dead, from vampires to zombies, Thorpe presents readers with a truly capacious definition of alienation. Encompassing the extraction of labor power, commodity fetishism, the destruction of the planet, and posthuman visions of automated workforces, Thorpe's contemporary conception of alienation renders "life dependent on the non-living" (37). Participation in the social world of twenty-first century Western society demands the ravenous consumption of commodity objects and the ability to consume requires the giving over of labor power to create dead capital for wages. To Thorpe, these relations demonstrate a capitalist world of social relations that primarily values the non-living: a necroculture.

The second chapter pushes the first's analysis further in a study of the ways that technological advancement, from industrial agriculture to biotechnology, remakes the natural world from a place abundant with life into a landscape of death, that is, a world subsumed into capital that is devoid of life. Beyond the clear dangers posed by drastic reduction in biodiversity and violent reality of climate catastrophe globally, the bio- and bionanotechnological possibilities to make life "artificial" in the relentless pursuit of capital is the true threat to and destruction of what Thorpe takes to be stable categories

of nature and the human (67). While genetic manipulation of crops and livestock subsumes the natural world to the capitalist control of predictability and production, Thorpe views the bioengineering mission to reduce life to standardized and replaceable parts as an artificial process that overvalues the non-living at a cost to life in pursuit of predictability, efficiency, and productivity (72–3).

In the third chapter, Thorpe extends his arguments regarding "artificial life" to the future of a de-corporeal experience celebrated in the works of the major techno-futurists Eric Drexler, Hans Moravec, and Ray Kurzweil. This chapter examines the limited scope and dangerous ahistoricity of the technological imagination that draws a linear progression of technology's evolutionary path through the elimination of the imperfect human from (138). Perhaps the most literal example of this techno-futurist necroculture is Kurzweil's concept of Singularity, which positions the history of human struggle and desire as subordinate to a linear progression of technological advancement facilitated by capitalist social relations (97). For Thorpe, "linear time expresses the autonomous and independent trajectory of technology" that values non-living technologies of evermore rapid technological advancement and the static social relations that capitalism requires over the living human experiences (100).

Chapter four is perhaps where Thorpe most directly takes up Fromm's definition of "necrophilia." More than just an attraction to death, Fromm's necrophilia is, as Thorpe restates it, a destructive and libidinal "passion to transform that which is alive into something unalive" (4). Critical of the Internet's possibilities for the radically free mobility of information, which Thorpe sees as an analogue to and facilitator of global markets (163), this chapter turns to the trafficking of women, and pornographic images of women and children, to demonstrate the Internet's ability to facilitate necrophilia. Obliquely building from the work of major feminist thinkers Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, Thorpe's argument for the sadistic quality of pornography is rooted neither in problems of patriarchy nor masculinity but instead in computer-mediated experiences of alienation (171, 190). According to Thorpe, degrading women by reducing them to non-living objects-images and Internet-surfing through pornographic websites fulfills the sadistic "desire to annihilate women as human subjects" with the ultimate aim of experiencing a destructive power and control facilitated by capitalist market relations (178).

Necroculture's concluding chapter unpacks the negative liberty that defines America's extreme commitment to classical liberalism through the flashpoint of the now waning libertarian-populist Tea Party movement. Their aggressive protection of individual rights to private property illustrates Thorpe's expansive understanding of necrophilia, that is, valuing non-living property over collective human well-being. However, in the apocalyptic vision of doomsday preppers and Tea Party members is an even more extreme example of the atomization he describes as the ravenous conclusion of negative liberty. In the necrocultural will for the "destruction of society" (213), the gun becomes the primary symbol of negative freedom. Guns enable their owners to end life in the pursuit of claiming and protecting their property (224), including themselves (222). Under this framework, the total destruction of community and interdependent relations is required to fulfill the promise of negative freedom.

Ultimately, in taking up this interpretive framework of alienation and necrophilia, Thorpe's methodology is irresponsibly limited to a strictly class-based cultural analysis of our contemporary moment. *Necroculture* sets aside feminist and anti-racist theoretical traditions for understanding patriarchal and race-based violence. For example, in extended examinations of sexual objectification of women through the pornography industry and extrajudicial vigilante murders of Black Americans, Thorpe's text takes class

antagonism and experiences of alienation to be the only relevant heuristic in a critical examination of the West's contemporary culture of decay and death.

In this regard, *Necroculture* offers opportunities to and, I argue, requires the reader to extend this "necrocultural" conceptual framework beyond the works of Marx and Fromm to consider other theoretical traditions concerned with histories of exploitation and thanatopolitics. What might Thorpe's necroculture of the West have to do with the necropolitical death-worlds that Achille Mbembe identifies as a key feature of colonial states? Where does this techno-futurist necroculture of alienation fit into the critical histories of social death and slavery, and the social deaths that came in slavery's aftermath? Ranging from feminist critical inquiries into historical and cultural femicide to neocolonial destruction wrought by the global debt economy, and including other perspectives, an assortment of non-class based inquiries remain unaddressed in Thorpe's text, yet they must be considered in relationship to any reading of this book.

å Bio



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Book Reviews

Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

Review of Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism by Melinda Cooper (Zone Books)

Rev. Dr. Michelle Walsh, LICSW

Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism. By Melinda Cooper. New York: Zone Books, 2017, 416 pp. (hardcover) ISBN 978 1 9354 08840. US List: \$29.95.

In an academic world flush with and made into silos by specialized topics, research articles, and books, Melinda Cooper's interdisciplinary integration is a most welcome map of the historical and contemporary forces that created political alliances between neoliberalism and neoconservatism. Tracing neoliberalism and neoconservatism's shared normative cultural understanding of family as heterosexual and essentially patriarchal, Cooper's meticulously researched book successfully documents the political forces and moments that altered the current landscape of social welfare, healthcare, and educational debt in the United States. Neoliberals and neoconservatives found common political cause in privatization of these areas through the vehicle of the family rather than through the government. Those who were politically aware and active from the 1960s through the 1980s will find themselves remembering many of these events and moments, but Cooper offers broader historical insights of their scope and implications. Those who grew up later and became politically active from the 1990s onward will be relieved that someone finally has decoded and documented so thoroughly the routes and signposts of the sociocultural political map in these historical areas. This book promises to be a classic study of the role that the family played in fomenting alliances between neoconservatives and neoliberals. Many academic disciplines beyond cultural studies may find particular chapters helpful in the classroom as well.

The integrative scope of Cooper's lens allows her to demonstrate nuanced understanding with ease between topics as diverse as economics, politics, theology, history, gender, race, education, sexuality, debt, welfare, and AIDS. At the same time, she succeeds in making the complex intertwining of these topics digestible and concrete for the reader in ways that keep them engaged throughout, including digging into her amply generous footnotes for more tidbits. Throughout these topics, the thread that links neoliberals and neoconservatives consistently is their shared concern, often for different reasons and values, to regulate the family as a foundational structural unit of society. The family thus becomes a shared referent for social regulation of sexuality, health, debt, and welfare-either for economic purposes or for religious and moral ends. This culturally common normative focal point fosters seemingly unusual or unexpected political alliances

grounded in repeated patterns of legally implemented social control—even when the normative conception of family eventually expands beyond solely a heteropatriarchal form. Cooper's particular talent is her capacity to expose these subtle patterns, their magnitude and implications, turning seemingly very odd political bedfellows into partners that make complete political sense, even if frightening in their depth of sense for some of us.

Cooper begins her book first by building an argument for the significance of the institution of the family as a ready-made focal point in history during times of economic and religious or moral turbulence. Her historical starting point is the creation of the Elizabethan Poor Law in 1601 in England as a national welfare system. She discusses the various ways this type of poor law, when transplanted to the United States, repeatedly has been recreated and reformed over time:

From the very beginning, the Poor Law enforcement of labor and family obligations worked hand in hand. When it came to adapting the laws and statutes of the Old World to the new American colonies, each of the thirteen states ended up replicating the Elizabethan Poor Law almost *in toto*, retaining many of the family responsibility provisions written into the original act. Every one of the colonies enacted criminal penalties against unmarried sex and civil laws requiring putative fathers to support illegitimate children. These laws seem to have applied most rigorously to indentured servants, again with the express aim of relieving local authorities of the burden of support...When the Civil War ended and former slaves were declared free laborers, they, too, came under the purview of newly invented family responsibility laws. As this history demonstrates, the poor laws were not only imported intact from England but were subsequently reinvented many times over as a means of disciplining new kinds of sexual and economic freedom. (74–75)

Cooper goes on to discuss the ways the Freedman Bureau, created in 1865, would "vigorous[ly] campaign to promote marriage among slaves" and how "agents were authorized to perform wedding ceremonies, to certify or dissolve informal unions that had begun before emancipation, and to track down spouses who had been forcibly separated by slave masters" (79). The ongoing regulative significance of the family as an instrument of state control used to shift the burden of economic support from the state onto a religiously sanctified social institution becomes clearer and clearer. Many state legislatures across the South followed suit in enacting and expanding these laws even after the closure of the Freedman Bureau. Cooper's tracing of these historical-political practices could be placed fruitfully into dialogue with theologian Kelly Brown Douglas' work, What's Faith God To Do With It? Black Bodies/Christian Souls (New York: Orbis Books, 2005). Douglas traces and deconstructs the development of white Christian cultural ideology, including family gender roles, and its internalization by African American slaves during and post-Civil War. In this regard, Cooper's book is a valuable supplement documenting the role of the state in fostering this cultural understanding of family through political practices.

Cooper continues her book by focusing on three major ongoing points of convergence in the social and moral control of economics, health, and sexuality when neoliberals and neoconservatives alike were able to draw upon the normative ideal of a heteropatriarchal family. These convergence points are illustrated in one chapter's focus on inherited wealth, another's on the AIDS crisis of the 1980s, and a third on the rise of student and family debt. Throughout these chapters, she carefully demonstrates the long-term formative impact of this convergence on the structural inequalities that pervade our contemporary situation. For example, in her chapter on inherited wealth, it is well known that the federal government underwrote the construction of housing and the suburbs for

a white heteropatriarchal normative family from the post-WWII era into the 1960s. Cooper further nuances the structural intersectionality of these legacies:

Federal housing policies, moreover, were not simply racializing but also tightly bound up with the normative regulation of gender and sexuality...A white man tied to the responsibilities of work and family was considered the most creditworthy of borrowers and the most insurable of risks; a single white man might have enjoyed more financial independence but was less likely to respect his long term obligations; a single working woman was in general barred from receiving any form of consumer credit in her own name. The standardization of consumer risk profiles relegated borrowers to a continuum of more or less insurable risks—with women, homosexuals, and the nonwhite defined as outliers on the bell-curve of credit risks. This premium placed on marital status within FHA lending criteria was supplemented by more overt forms of exclusion directed toward homosexuals... (146–47)

Federally fostered wealth accumulation through the savings bank of one's house not only excluded certain groups along the lines of race, gender, and sexual orientation, it also fostered social networking and thereby social capital among normative white heteropatriarchal families by virtue of their being clustered in suburban spaces.

Cooper's chapters on the 1980s AIDS crisis and the rise of family and student debt are filled with numerous such additional intersectional insights worth reading word for word. Each could stand alone as a chapter excerpt for a class utilizing such political and policy cultural case studies. She closes with a chapter on the role of public theology in shaping the contemporary faith-based welfare state, examining the rise of religious nonprofits and programs in public welfare arenas, such as providing services in prisons, homeless shelters, and other needed areas in the wake of deinstitutionalization of hospitals. Along the way, she documents how the religious right learned to use the same civil rights legal tools that the left had first utilized to expand welfare rights and dismantle structural racism in order to now challenge these same laws in the name of religious freedom. Such challenges emerged as a response to being denied the same opportunity for state and federal funding of welfare initiatives as secular groups and also to being required to follow anti-discrimination clauses viewed as infringing on religious freedom. Cooper points out that "Not only have Christian litigators borrowed the tools of their enemies, but they also have turned these tools against them-deploying religious freedom to annul the jurisprudence of sexual freedom and religious antidiscrimination laws to override the gender-based protections of a previous era" (304–5).

At the same time that neoconservatives were turning to legal strategies, neoliberals became interested in the sociological concept of "mediating structures" of civil society—such as family, church, and community mediating between an individual's private and public life—as promoted by sociologist Peter Berger and theologian Richard John Neuhaus. Here a sociologist, concerned about secularization, and a theologian found neoliberal common ground. Berger and Neuhaus' conception of mediating structures also found common ground with neoconservatives. Combining neoconservative legal challenges to religious freedom and neoliberal motivations of economic cost savings and moral investment allowed more and more services to be turned over to religious organizations, often with evangelical agendas. For those who continue to adhere to the stock story that there really is a separation of church and state in the United States, Cooper's book successfully adds to works dispelling this myth. It uncovers the many concealed stories in our history of the ongoing connection and intertwining of church and state.

Cooper's nuanced understanding that evangelicals also can be on a spectrum from right to left lends greater insight to, for instance, the power of the Moral Monday and Repairer of the Breach movement today, led by Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II. Analysis of this movement may be a good way to update her study. Regarding the evangelical left, Cooper states that its political power was compromised by its prior commitments to pro-life stances and opposition to marriage equality. Drawing on the power of fusion politics, Barber and his political and religious partners have demonstrated their willingness to stride this divide in full support of women's reproductive rights as well as the LGBTQ community, including challenges to the so-called "bathroom bill" in North Carolina on behalf of transgender rights. I wonder what Cooper might make of this new religious coalition and its challenges to structural inequalities at the national level for healthcare and their commitment to renewing Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Poor Peoples Campaign. Does a religious fusion politics of the left constitute a new or even radical variable in the mix today?

It is impossible to give this brilliant and richly researched book its full due in a short book review. I am confident, however, that this is a book that will reside comfortably on a shelf with other classics that provide ongoing depth of historical, political, and cultural insight into our contemporary struggles with structural oppressions. I often thought most recently of Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* while reading Cooper's text, and how Cooper supplies added integrative value to Alexander's work. Again, this book should be widely read by academics and students of fields as far ranging as cultural and sociological studies, social work, ministry, public healthcare advocates, student debt and union advocates, etc. Individual chapters could be pulled out for powerful educational use. This is not a book that will provide you with an easy map of strategies out of our current struggles, yet if we do not accurately map and know our history, we will inevitably continue to repeat its patterns. I am grateful and excited for Cooper's contributions to an ever more accurate historical map.

≜ Bio

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David Zeglen, "Review of *Gramsci's Common Sense: Inequality and Its Narratives* by Kate Crehan (Duke University Press)," *Lateral 6.2* (2017).

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Book Reviews

Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

Review of *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, edited by Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent (Polity)

David Zeglen

Foucault and Neoliberalism, by Zamora, D., and Behrent, M.C., (editors) Cambridge, Polity Press, 2016, \$16.95, 152 pp., ISBN: 978-1-5095-0177-9

Since the Great Financial Crisis and Trump's election last November, the Anglo-American Left's increasing sectarianism over identity politics versus exploitation has reached a fever pitch, evoking the divisive "Marx versus Foucault" debate that haunts cultural studies. Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent's edited collection *Foucault & Neoliberalism* traces this homology between the academy and the Left public sphere back to the birth of French neoliberalism via a reckoning of Michael Foucault's public politics and academic works in the last two decades of his life.

Wisely sidestepping the banal question of whether or not Foucault was a neoliberal, Foucault & Neoliberalism more modestly argues that Foucault's project, particularly after May 1968, bore striking similarities with neoliberalism. Although scholars have debated this issue since at least the French publication of The Birth of Biopolitics, Foucault & Neoliberalism shows that, since the English publication of the same lecture series in the inauspicious year of 2008, the American university has increasingly deracinated Foucault from his French context and thereby misread his attitude toward neoliberalism. Thus Foucault & Neoliberalism, an English translation of Zamora's previous anthology in French, Critiquer Foucault, seeks to revive the debate—and has done so in the pages of Jacobin magazine thus far—by situating Foucault back into his proper historical milieu.

To accomplish this, Foucault & Neoliberalism deploys two methods. First, given the vigorous debates over interpretations of his Collège de France lectures, several contributors contextualize Foucault's work by examining his public positions and intellectual affinities during the late 1970s and early 1980s. As Zamora, Behrent, and Mitchell Dean's chapters illustrate, Foucault publicly supported policies that were also championed by the godfathers of neoliberalism—Milton Friedman, Friedrich Hayek, and Gary Becker—such as a negative income tax, opposition to universal healthcare, and social security. As Dean demonstrates with a revealing passage in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, while Foucault was critical of figures like Becker, he also believed that neoliberal solutions to social issues provided the best alternative form of power for the protection of individual freedom because neoliberalism did not seek to subjectify, only to incentivize.

Foucault's policy positions are also situated within a larger epistemic zeitgeist in French intellectual society after the economic crisis of the early 1970s led to the ascent of

neoliberal thinking. Michael Scott Christofferson reads Foucault's support of the increasingly popular "new philosophers" and his close association with the rising Second Left as a sign that the dominant terrain of political struggle in France had shifted from overcoming class-based exploitation to supporting the individual rights of society's excluded. Within this historical context, Christofferson argues *The Birth of Biopolitics* should be understood as Foucault's attempt to think through a new type of governmentality beyond sovereign, disciplinary, and biopolitical power, one that draws upon free market solutions that regulate people the least and respect individual difference. As Dean states, "like many intellectuals of his period and later, [Foucault] would look into the liberal and neoliberal repertoire to find ways of renovating social-democratic or socialist politics and escaping its perceived fatal statism" (100).

Second, Foucault & Neoliberalism's contributors interrogate Foucault's own theoretical positions to elucidate their compatibility with neoliberal ideas. For instance, Christofferson points out that Foucault's crude one-sided theorization of modern state power helped him generate a chain of equivalence between the USSR, Nazi Germany, and Western Europe. As a result, Foucault's work contains a broad anti-statism that lends itself to Hayekian arguments about the inherent totalitarianism of the state. Behrent also argues that Foucault's deep-seated philosophical anti-humanism positioned him to be receptive to neoliberalism due to his emphasis on the market as a power that limits power itself. Finally, Amselle points out that the neoliberal mantra of "personal responsibility" strongly resembles Foucault's shift to "ethical self-concern" in his final lectures, with the attendant consequences. As Amselle elaborates, Foucault's "ethical self-concern...can be seen as [an] extremely conservative techniqu[e] for psychological maintenance, in the sense that they refer individual expression or grievances back to individuals themselves, thus averting any condemnation of the society in which they live" (165). Some may dispute that many of the above claims, when analyzed individually, do not necessarily lead to a neoliberal politics, and that many of these points indicate a broad liberal sympathy and vague anti-statism. However, when all the claims are taken together, Foucault & Neoliberalism forcefully elucidates a picture of Foucault who was intellectually experimenting with a wide swath of ideas that shared a common political logic.

Indeed, one of the more fascinating aspects of *Foucault & Neoliberalism* is its teasing out of some of the intellectual consequences of uncritically using Foucault's late work to theorize a politics of the Left. As Zamora argues, Foucault's restricted focus on social exclusion and the redistribution of power independent of economic exploitation limits an analysis of the historical and material conditions that produce, and are produced by, structural inequalities thereby contributing to the reproduction of neoliberalism. Amselle also asserts that the Foucauldian obsession with defending individual difference leads to a postmodern politics involving the demand for zones of absolute autonomy that respect individual difference rather than the overthrow of the neoliberal ruling classes and the revolutionary seizure of state power. In effect, *Foucault & Neoliberalism* alludes to how critical social theory has succumbed to the Foucault fetish—the intellectual shift Foucault represents that obfuscates political economy—and thereby lost one of cultural studies' main methodological commitments: conceptualizing culture in relation to the social totality.

Although these asides are more assumed than backed up by evidence in the volume, readers familiar with American cultural studies will no doubt recognize that the field, since at least the 1990s, is in fact closely tied with a postmodern politics of identity that has found a comfortable compatibility with neoliberalism. Indeed, it isn't much of a stretch to suggest that several colleges across America have interpellated their students as neoliberal subjects versed in the respect of difference.

However, Foucault & Neoliberalism does not argue that Foucault's work should be rejected tout court simply because uncritical invocations can help legitimize, rather than analyze, neoliberalism. While the volume frequently critiques Foucault's propensity to mistake appearance for essence, two of the volume's standout contributions also build theories from his work that incorporate the ideological and the material to better understand the neoliberal conjuncture. Observing that like Foucault, governmentality studies treats the self-image of neoliberalism as reality, Jan Rehmann argues that there are concrete disciplinary practices in the workplace that obfuscate neoliberalism's hierarchical realities. Rehmann suggests that governmentality studies integrate critical ideology theory within their analysis of management textbooks to help emphasize how the material and the symbolic function together under neoliberal governmentality. While agreeing with some of Foucault's arguments about disciplinary power, Loïc Wacquant points out that Foucault's theoretical gaps about the modern prison also stem from his overreliance on abstract models of penal reform rather than concrete practices. To correct this, Waquant puts Foucault in dialogue with Bourdieu's concept of the bureaucratic field to illuminate how neoliberal penality involves a state apparatus that monopolizes the legitimate use of material and symbolic violence. Thus, contrary to some critiques about the volume, Foucault & Neoliberalism is not insisting that scholars throw Foucault out with the bath water.

Although *Foucault & Neoliberalism* makes a series of fascinating claims, some of the volume's arguments sometimes rest on questionable evidence. For instance, Dean quotes Francois Ewald, one of Foucault's former students, from an interview Ewald conducted with Gary Becker, to bolster the argument that Foucault sympathized with neoliberalism. However, in the same interview, Ewald also claims that he is only offering his own neoliberal reading of Foucault, and that Foucault would offer a different view if he were there himself. Furthermore, in response to Dean's chapter in the volume, Ewald has publicly stated that he is astonished that Foucault could ever be identified with liberalism and neoliberalism. Thus Dean assumes an unmediated transmission of interpretation from teacher to student, much as Foucault had done when he saw a direct link from Marx to Stalin. Likewise, Christofferson argues that Foucault in part endorsed Glucksmann's book because the former was obsessed with maintaining his celebrity status. Although an interesting claim, Christofferson makes no effort to elaborate on this, nor is it clear how it is germane to the overall argument of his chapter, or the volume.

However, these minor deficiencies do not significantly detract from the provocative, well-researched, and necessary intervention that the volume represents. Foucault & Neoliberalism can rightly take its place as an original contribution to the litany of critiques of Foucault, and hopefully act as a lighthouse to future scholars of cultural studies who decide to study neoliberalism.

≜ Bio



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Book Reviews

Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

Review of *Gramsci's Common Sense: Inequality and Its Narratives* by Kate Crehan (Duke University Press)

Robert Carley

Gramsci's Common Sense: Inequality and Its Narratives. By Kate Crehan. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016, 222 pp. (paperback) ISBN 978 0 8223 6239 5. US List: \$23.95.

Over a decade prior to the publication of Gramsci's Common Sense: Inequality and Its Narratives, Kate Crehan published *Gramsci*, *Culture*, and *Anthropology*¹. This book provided a clearly worded and thorough analysis of Gramsci's thought in relationship to much of his pre-prison journalism focused, expressly, on Gramsci's writing about folk culture, socialist interventions into "national popular" culture, but, more generally, on Gramsci's understanding of culture in the framework of power: ideology, hegemony, and the role of traditional intellectuals at the national level. This book was both accessible and sufficiently complex for a theoretically minded audience; it introduced Gramsci to its audiences and at the same time it managed to provide a holistic approach to Gramsci's thought, connecting political, societal, and cultural categories from Gramsci's work to anthropology and other fields where culture is central to theory and analysis. In Gramsci's Common Sense, Kate Crehan offers us another excellent book, this time focused expressly on three important and often not well or fully understood concepts in Gramsci's work: "subalterns," "intellectuals," and "common sense." In her characteristically clear and accessible prose, Crehan weaves an explanatory tapestry containing several threads in each of the four initial chapters focused on the concepts mentioned here. The first thread is a discussion and explanation of the difficulties in reading Gramsci and understanding the genesis of his thought as it pertains specifically to each of these concepts; the second thread is a critical review of the limitations and errors that inhere in the work of important thinkers and entire fields of study as they interpret Gramsci; the third thread is the excellent intellectual historiography and philological analysis that owes no small debt to recent Gramsci scholarship and, also, the enormous works of translation conducted principally by Joseph Buttigieg. Crehan succeeds in producing a smooth and seamless discussion of some of Gramsci's most popular, important, and, also, misinterpreted concepts poising each for use in analysis and interpretation.

The goal of these first four chapters is neither merely to clarify Gramsci's thought nor to "set the record straight," so to say. Rather, Crehan enlists these three concepts (subalterns, intellectuals, and common sense) to help us understand contemporary inequality and the response to it on the part of mass movements—social movements that have emerged since the global economic and financial crisis of 2008. Crehan focuses

specifically on the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street movements as case studies set against and analyzed through the theoretical framework that she builds in the first half of the book. One of the strengths of *Gramsci's Common Sense* is that it demonstrates Gramsci's contemporary relevance by revealing the complexity of the analysis of class-based inequality and its political expressions of how inequality is lived, understood, and experienced—socially, culturally, and in the framework of "everyday life."

In the latter part of the first half of the book, careful readers, those well acquainted with Gramsci, and theorists may detect intimations of a synthesis between the book's three central concepts. In the final chapter, "Reading Gramsci in the Twenty-First Century," Crehan draws together the categories that are discussed in the first half of the book to, as she states in the concluding paragraph, successfully chart, "the relationship between the condition of subalternity and the knowledge born of subaltern experience first as incoherent and contradictory common sense, but then elaborated and rendered coherent by the organic intellectuals who emerge out of that subaltern experience" (198). Based on her discussion of the concept of subalternity in the first and fourth chapters, the rich examples from her case studies, and in the interest of drawing her project together, Crehan drives home the larger point that

Such knowledge—always organically linked to the structural realities of class—is a central element in the reproduction or transformation of any regime of power. Despite being written in the mid-twentieth century, Gramsci's complicated and anything but economistic account of class can provide a helpful guide, although never a simple template, for those trying to imagine the possibilities for radical change in our grossly unequal, twenty-first-century world (198).

Now, this quotation captures the "takeaway" of the book for those engaged with and trying to understand the direction, intensity, and organization of contemporary struggles and movements. The book succeeds, in no small part, because Crehan never drops the thread of class analysis which is central to Gramsci's work despite the fact that for so many (though not all) who have interpreted Gramsci in "post" frameworks, avoiding Gramsci's politics and his Marxism (or dismissing it as orthodox or vulgar—choose your preferred term) seemed a central criterion for postmodern, post-structural, and even post-Marxist approaches.

One question that came up, for me was why Crehan had not engaged, in the case studies, with Gramsci's organizational efforts that developed, slowly and steadily, in 1916 in Turin, Italy after he left his studies. I am, however, convinced after completing the book that her approach to "sense making" on the part of both adherents and members of the Tea Party and participants in the Occupy Wall Street movement given both the hegemonic forces that they contended with, and how they continue to contend with them, on the one hand, and the enormous, cumbersome, and exhaustively detailed historical work (largely a product, in the English language, of biographical and historical analyses beginning in the late 1960s and continuing up to Darrow Schecter's Gramsci and the Theory of Industrial *Democracy*²) on the other, that Crehan made the right choice to allow these texts to speak for themselves; to remain suggestive of organizational concerns, strategies, and programs. Methodologically, too, there may be limited value in an historical comparative analysis of the organization of ward and factory councils to the organizational framework and capacity of the Occupy movement to think about activism, goals, and politics. After all, as Crehan notes in the last sentence of the book, Gramsci's contributions are largely to set those combating inequality on the path of understanding hegemony less as a metaphysical event and more as a philosophical fact.

My hope, however, is that *Gramsci's Common Sense: Inequality and Its Narratives*, will enable cultural studies scholars, in particular, to consider new ways to think beyond the paradigm for the interrelation of class and culture offered by Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson. Crehan's careful analysis and demonstration of the role of class analysis in Gramsci's work will, I believe, allow scholars who come from the Birmingham school tradition and, also, from out of Stuart Hall's rich and important contribution to the analysis of the intersections of race, class, and culture, to find new points of contact that may have been lost or not fully grown to fruition given the cultural politics of the Left in Britain at the time. It is because Crehan's book is *that* good: *that* prescient, *that* well written, and *that* strong of an interpretation of Gramsci's relevance for our times that it should be read across disciplines, by activists, politically engaged artists, filmmakers, and any cultural worker, critic, or analyst who finds themselves feeling cut off from the world at this point in our current conjuncture. And, not to end on a diminutive note, but it is short, under 200 pages, and eminently accessible to undergraduates.

Notes

- 1. Kate Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
- 2. Darrow Schecter, *Gramsci* and the *Theory of Industrial Democracy* (Brookfield, VT: Gowver, 1991).

å <u>Bio</u>



Robert Carley

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Rachel Kuo, "Review of *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism* by lyko Day (Duke University Press)," *Lateral 6.2* (2017).

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Book Reviews

Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

Review of *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization* and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism by Iyko Day (Duke University Press)

Rachel Kuo

Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism. By lyko Day. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016, 245 pp. (paperback) ISBN 978 0 8223 6093 3. US List: \$24.95

lyko Day makes a compelling intervention in discussions of race, capital, and settler colonialism. Her book presents a theorization of the abstract economism of Asian racialization by examining how social differentiation functions as a destructive form of abstraction anchored by settler colonial ideologies of romantic anticapitalism. By engaging with capitalism's abstraction of differentiated gendered and racialized labor in order to create value, Day's project diverges from scholarship arguing that capitalism profits from labor via the production, rather than the abstraction, of racialized difference (Lowe 1996; Roediger 2008). Her book engages a rich multimedia archive and uses principal historical instances of Asian North American cultural production as theoretical texts to examine key racial policies since the 19th century: Chinese railroad labor in the 1880s, anti-Asian immigration restrictions; internment of Japanese civilians during World War II, and the neoliberalization of immigration policy in the late 1960s.

She begins her book with the moment when a "Caucasian-looking woman" replaced an Asian woman as scientist on the Canadian one-hundred-dollar bill and she ends with the "Iron Chink," a moment when a machine replaced 30 Chinese laborers in the Pacific Northwest salmon canneries. While the narrative moment describing the one-hundred-dollar bill highlights the abstraction of Asians as money commodity and the narrative moment discussing the "Iron Chink" highlights the abstraction of Asians as machine commodity, both moments function as racial signifiers. These different signifiers demonstrate the dialectical nature of concrete and abstract labor and also produce Asians as a destructive, abstract form of capital. The replacement, disposability, and rejection of the Asian figure in both of these objects illustrate Day's argument that the "Asian subject in North America personifies abstract processes of value formation anchored by labor" (8). The racial, gendered, and qualitatively distinct characteristics of labor become obscured and abstracted as an expression of value. More specifically, Asian North American labor practices are aligned with values of cheapness and efficiency, forms of cultural production that amplify how Asians are perceived as "abstract labor."

In the introduction, Day provides a helpful overview of romantic anticapitalism through a reading of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism and also maps out a triangulation of

Native, alien, and settler positions as a way to articulate settler colonial processes of racialization as constituted by land and labor. Romantic anticapitalism reveres the concrete realm of "dusty workbooks by the door, the reliable pickup truck in the driveway" while casting the abstract realm of "capital accumulation, surplus-value, and money" as a harmful, dominating force of capitalism. This false distinction between capital accumulation and labor as a lived practice demonstrates a misunderstanding that the seemingly abstract nature of value is objectified within the concrete form of the commodity (10). Romantic anticapitalism, as dominant settler colonial ideology, reinforces the triangulation Native, alien, and settler positions through the misperception of capitalism as this opposition between a "concrete natural world and a destructively abstract, value-driven one" (16).

The racial interplay of settler colonial exclusion and elimination undergirds Day's analysis of Asian North America and the personification of capitalism. In reviewing literature on theories of settler colonialism and Asian racialization, Day categorically constitutes a transnational framework of racialization that is grounded in settler colonial logics and also includes nonwhite migration and involuntary contexts of migration. Her triangulation of Native, alien, and settler places the highly differentiated populations of African slaves and Asian migrants under the category of "alien." She writes: "For slaves and racialized migrants, the degree of forced or voluntary migration or level of complicity with the settler state is ultimately secondary to their subordination under a settler colonial mode of production driven by the proprietorial logics of whiteness" (24).

In this sense, Day extends the complicity of the "alien" position within the settler colonial regime. While aliens may eventually inherit the settler sense of sovereign territorial rights, they also become subjected to the settler state's logics of exclusion and elimination that reinforce and protect settler control. Under settler colonialism, Native populations are subjected to logics of elimination in order to ensure settler control over land. In the case of Black slaves, settlers sought to increase the property value of this perceived exclusive labor force and managed slave labor through a violent calculus of containment and exclusion. As migrants, Asians' primary relationship to settler colonialism was also based on their labor, transforming Indigenous land into white property and capital. Yet, Asians were seen as a disposable, impermanent form of labor that could be both excluded and eliminated from the nation-state through mechanisms such as immigration policies that deterred entry, naturalization, voting, property ownership, etc.

Each chapter explores the negative abstraction of Asians under the settler colonial ideology of romantic anticapitalism. In the first chapter, Day begins her discussion of racialized labor as money with a caricature sketch of a Chinese laborer on the back of telegram. She subsequently engages Richard Fung's documentary *Dirty Laundry: A History of Heroes* alongside Maxine Hong Kingston's memoir *China Men* to look at recurring themes of substitutions that expose racial, sexual, and gender differences as degraded supplements within white settler colonialism. For example, Kingston's text presents a moment at a ceremony where a white man drives in the final, commemorative spike after Chinese workers complete the railroad and Fung's film uses character substitutions to comment on the Chinese body as an abstract object where racial and sexual discourse become projected. By experimenting with nonlinear, or "perverse" temporalities (58) through acts of substitution, these cultural texts in the first chapter (the documentary and memoir) offer a response to the telegram, demonstrating how the abstraction of Asian alien labor becomes established through transgressions against time's normalizing functions.

Her second chapter looks at landscape photography by artists Jin-me Yoon and Tseng Kwong Chi, exposing how romantic anticapitalism thrived during the peak of anti-Asian immigration restrictions by projecting settler identification with personified, Indigenous landscapes and rendering Native-ness as a biologized expression of concrete value. Here, she makes an interesting observation of landscape as symbols of national identity (ex: Canada's Banff National Park evokes Canada's nationalist identity with the North) and how eugenic ideology created analogies between wilderness protection and white racial preservation. For example, Tseng Kwong Chi's staged photos feature himself in racialized excess, in "Chinese drag," and his alien body degrades and intrudes upon the 'natural' landscape.

Following her argument on how abstract capital becomes racialized as Asian, her third chapter focuses on the resignification of Japanese labor as ideal, efficient, and compliant during the period of internment. Day contextualizes the exclusion, internment, and relocation of Japanese Americans and Canadians by discussing the abstraction of Japanese agriculture and fishing labor as a dehumanizing symbol of technological modernization. The association of Japanese labor with excessive industry fed a misperception of their control over the creation of relative surplus-value, the unnatural "value produced above and beyond surplus value" (130). Yet, the process of land dispossession and coerced labor under internment associated Japanese labor with a "romanticized noneconomism" of Indigeneity, which transformed Japanese labor into a dependent surplus labor force (123; 149). In addressing the idealization of Indigeneity as seemingly outside of capitalism, alongside settler colonialism's trajectory of colonial elimination through assimilation, Day uses Joy Kogawa's novel Obasan and Rea Tajiri's video History and Memory to discuss this labor resignification—the mutation of Japanese labor into an ideal labor force—as a way to understand the logics of and relationship between settler colonialism and romantic anticapitalism. Finally, her fourth chapter looks at multimedia artist Ken Lum's work and Karen Tei Yamashita's novel Tropic of Orange to examine the aesthetics of reconfiguring borders as an apparatus of neoliberal multiculturalism (Melamed 2006), a logic of inclusion that deploys multiculturalism as a response to economic imperatives (167). Using cultural diversity and border-crossing as a means to facilitate investment and trade, the neoliberalization of borders substitutes economic class for race and continues to preserve racialized abstractions that surround multiple tiers of classed labor, while also bifurcating the economism of Asian racialization into high-tech, flexible labor, and working-class labor (155). Settler colonial capitalism becomes fulfilled through the migrant labor system (189).

Of her project, Day writes that she strives to construct a flexible, rather than ethnically determined model, that can be expanded and adapted to different historical circumstances of Asian populations that are not extensively covered in her book (35). As her work invites new conversations about the entwinements of Asian racialization, settler colonialism, and racial capitalism, I would also be interested in future work across different fields that take up Day's category of "alien" positions and theory of abstract economism to more fully and carefully engage the differentiated legal, historical, social, and political contexts between the many and varied populations rendered "alien" in Day's account. For example, how might other scholars take up this work to more capaciously engage with Blackness as well as with migration from Latin America? Additionally, how might one apply Day's theoretical intervention to empirical fields and methods of research and scholarship?







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Book Reviews

Issue 6.2 (Winter 2017) — Not a Trump Issue

Review of *Atari Age: The Emergence of Video Games in America* by Michael Z. Newman (MIT Press)

Jared Bahir Browsh

Atari Age: The Emergence of Video Games in America. By Michael Z. Newman. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017, 264 pp. (Trade Hardcover) ISBN 978 0 262 03571 2 US List: 29.95

Due the growth of the market, attention paid to Gamergate, and the rise of eSports, interest in the cultural influence of video games has increased significantly in recent years. Much of this attention is focused on the current state of the industry and the rhetoric surrounding the medium, overlooking the early development of the industry that established cultural practices for the medium. In *Atari Age*, Michael Z. Newman does some of this work examining the early period of video games in America when arcades and game rooms emerged in suburban malls around the country, televisions became "entertainment centers," and computers and game consoles were one in the same.

Starting with the introduction of the first home video game console, the Magnavox Odyssey, in 1972, the marketing, technical advancements, and discussions surrounding videos games from this early era are examined, building an early social history of what is now a multi-billion-dollar industry. Newman's analysis takes the reader through the next ten years of development to the video game market crash that began in 1983 as a result of saturation of the market. Newman's concise, focused review of this decade of video game history is engaging, introducing readers new to game studies with an early social history of gaming, while still providing scholars studying popular culture examples that can contribute to their own analyses.

The analysis begins at the turn of the century, when Nickelodeons and other forms coinoperated entertainment appeared in arcades and parlors. Pinball rose in popularity during the depression, but association with gambling resulted in bans in many locations throughout the country including New York City. The introduction of flippers and popular culture like The Who's *Tommy* led to the resurgence of pinball in the 1970s, but continued associations with illicit behavior followed coin-operated entertainment as more machines appeared in various businesses. The presence of new computer technology and video games' placement in sterilized, typically white middle class shopping centers and malls provided arcades with a reputation as a safe place for children to spend their leisure time, which followed video games as they entered homes during the same period. Arcades became a space for predictable, albeit typically masculine, interactions while also serving as a launch-point for video games that later made their way to the home market.

In the next chapter, Newman discusses the relationship between television and video games, as companies like Magnavox and Atari helped turn a formerly passive medium into one that is interactive, a transition aided by the introduction of other technologies like video tape recording and cable. Utilizing advertisements, Newman shows how the games were sold to the home market and how manufacturers expected families to utilize the consoles often based on their experience selling televisions, other electronics, or in the case of Mattel, toys.

The third chapter begins by discussing the evolution of the family room throughout the 20th century that radio, television, and then the video game console occupied. The ideal white middle-class suburban family had a living room in which everyone gathered for leisure time with each other, often around the television, which replaced the hearth or fireplace in most homes. Although video games transcended race or socioeconomics by the mid-1970s, advertisements celebrated the association between the bourgeoisie lifestyle and ownership of consoles. Originally marketed as a technology to be shared by the family, gaming quickly became a masculine pursuit as fathers were more likely to introduce a console into the home, often participating in play with their sons. Long held gender expectations for children during the late Cold War, lingering assumptions about the dangers of arcades, and games inspired by sports or simplistic narratives based on good defeating evil also contributed to video games being considered a more acceptable activity for boys.

Chapter four explores the intersection between video games, computers, and play, beginning with a short overview of the history of computers from huge machines only available at large institutions like colleges to personal computers manufactured for the home. As computers built specifically to play games, video game consoles were often the first home computer for many families. Later, personal computers were marketed as multi-functional machines that could engage the interests of all members of a family, from business management to Space Invaders, making many early consoles obsolete by the early 1980s. This combination of practicality and leisure is visualized in marketing material for personal computers throughout this period.

The fifth chapter reviews the reaction to the proliferation of video games into homes and communities, particularly the pushback from parents and lawmakers concerning the perceived truancy and danger associated with arcades and excessive play. Changes in business regulations and laws restricted where game rooms could go and when children could play games or even enter retail areas. This increased public attention also led to academic inquiry marking the true origins of game studies, as scholars gathered to share knowledge about the social impact of games. This is also reflected in popular culture from the early to mid 1980s, when techno- or game-centric stories appeared more frequently in television and film.

The last chapter focuses on the popularity of Pac-Man, which was released by Midway in 1980. In spite of a simple design and concept, the multimedia marketing of the Pac-Man character and related properties served as an example for future video game franchises, while also helping to accelerate the saturation of the home video game market that would result in the industry crash three years later.

As an introduction to the politics and economics of early home video games, *Atari Age* is a good starting point for readers looking to familiarize themselves with the foundational actors and social contexts surrounding the industry in the 1970s and early 1980s. At points, it does seem the focus on advertising and trade press limits potential engagement with other possible influences on perceptions of video games, but it still useful overview of the origins of what has become a global cultural form.





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